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DEVON TRADITIONS AND  
FAIRY - TALES



# Devon Traditions and Fairy-Tales

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BY

J. R. W. COXHEAD



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Published by The Raleigh Press, Exmouth



DEVON TRADITIONS AND  
FAIRY-TALES

*First Published April, 1959*

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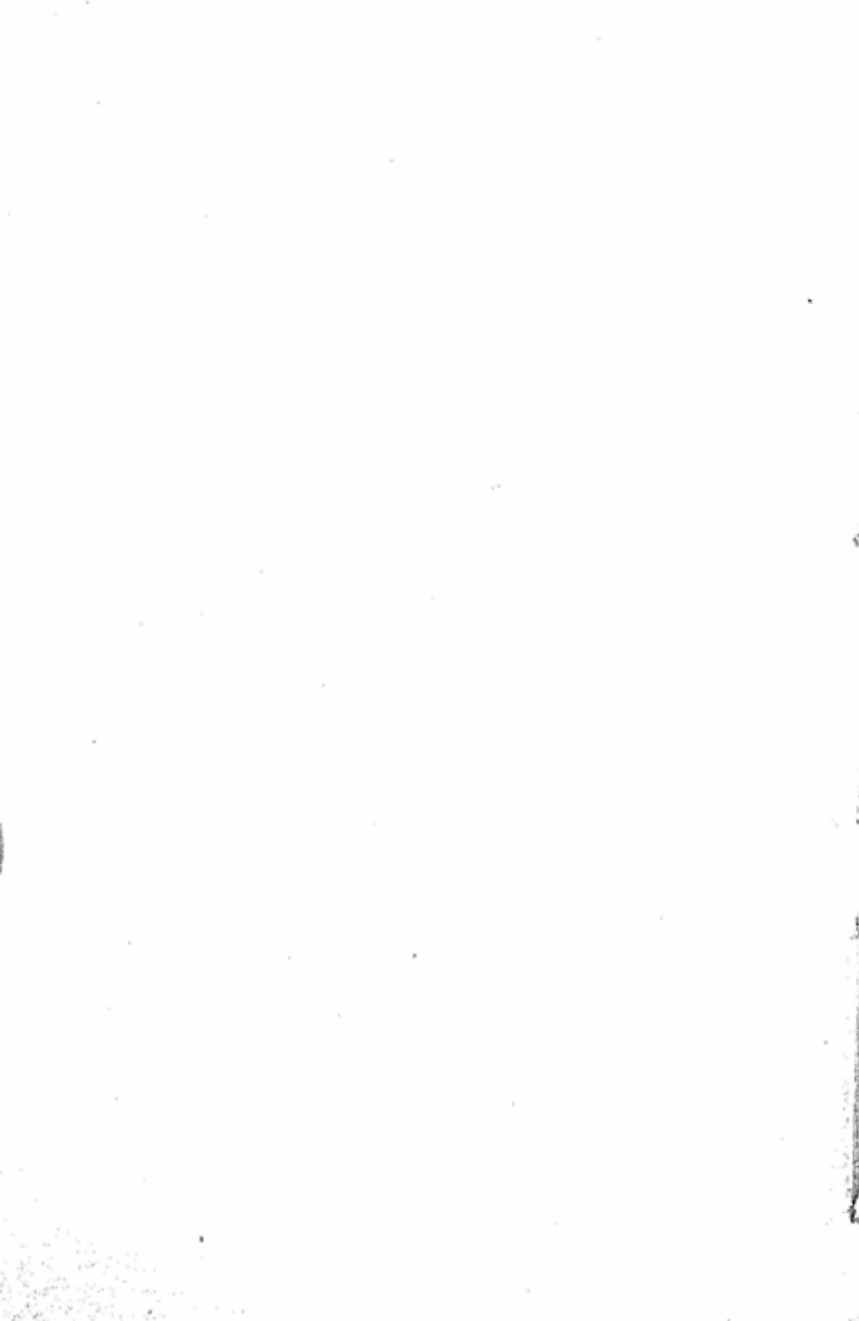
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TO  
MY GOD-SON  
TIMOTHY GEORGE LILLIES

Recd from Mrs. Lillies, 1000 N. 6th St.  
Jan. 1888



## FOREWORD

The fabulous land of fairy-tale and legend which lies hidden within the enfolding mists of enchantment can be extremely elusive to those in search of the folk-traditions of the past.

This wonderful country is inhabited by fairies, giants, wizards and fearsome dragons. Gallant knights ride through great forests to rescue fair ladies from the clutches of wicked ogres. The gleaming turrets of magic castles pierce the weaving mists, ancient heroes sleep in mysterious caverns beneath haunted hills surrounded by their slumbering warriors, and witches fly swiftly through the pale light of the moon to their secluded trysting places.

Although legends are very often interwoven with magic spells, fantastic superstitions, or seemingly impossible tasks, they usually contain some element of truth or historic fact. Myths, however, are legends of a different type; they have no historical foundation whatsoever, and are simply figments of the imagination of fanciful people of a bygone age.

Tales about fairies and pixies connected with the wilder and more remote parts of Devon may be traced back to a race of small Bronze Age people for whom the early Iron Age folk had a superstitious fear. The legends of giants are thought to be derived from vague traditions of the gods and nature-spirits of long-forgotten religious beliefs, and the stories about dragons are probably race-memories of primeval cave-man's terror of the huge prehistoric monsters which roamed over the earth countless thousands of years ago.

In the old days, families lived in the same country parishes for generations, and it was the custom on winter nights for a whole family to sit around a roaring fire of logs while the older folk told the tales that had been handed down to them by their forbears. It was in this homely way that the legends and traditions of a countryside were passed on to the youngsters, who, in turn, when they grew old handed them on to their children.

In bygone times, a very large proportion of the population in rural areas could neither read nor write, consequently their memories were very keen, and when they heard a story they remembered it almost word-for-word for the rest of their lives. In this way legends were passed on for hundreds of years with the main points of the tale remaining unaltered, but often gaining a wealth of colourful detail which sometimes tends to obscure valuable historical facts.

With the coming of the railways, and the introduction of daily newspapers, this preservation of the old traditions by word of mouth was gradually discontinued, and today, with wireless or television sets in nearly every home, the handing on of local traditions within the family circle has become very much a thing of the past.

It is a great pity that efforts to preserve the legends of the English countryside were not started earlier while some of the old folk who knew them were still alive. There are good reasons for believing that, about the middle of the nineteenth century, a wealth of fairy-lore and legend must have been lost to us for ever with the passing of many interesting old people in secluded parts of the Dartmoor and Exmoor districts.

From time to time long-lost legends are found in rare books, manuscripts, or old diaries, and are carefully added to the already rich store of folklore which has been collected for the county of Devon.

The success of my book, "Legends of Devon," has given me so much encouragement that I feel a second volume

on this wonderfully interesting subject may not come amiss. In "Legends of Devon," I paid particular attention to the traditions of the eastern part of the county, but in this volume I have concentrated my efforts on the folklore of Dartmoor, with the result that I have been able to include in the book two chapters about that very interesting part of Devon—one containing some of the legends and traditions of the district, and the other devoted entirely to stories of a fairy-tale type.

My grateful thanks are due to Miss Theo Brown, Folk-Lore Recorder to the Devonshire Association, for kindly allowing me to include in Chapter III of this book the legend, "The Spectral Pigs of Merripit Hill," and I would also like to take this opportunity of thanking Miss Christina Hole, for granting me permission to quote extracts from her wonderfully interesting books, "English Folk-Heroes," and "Witchcraft in England"\*.

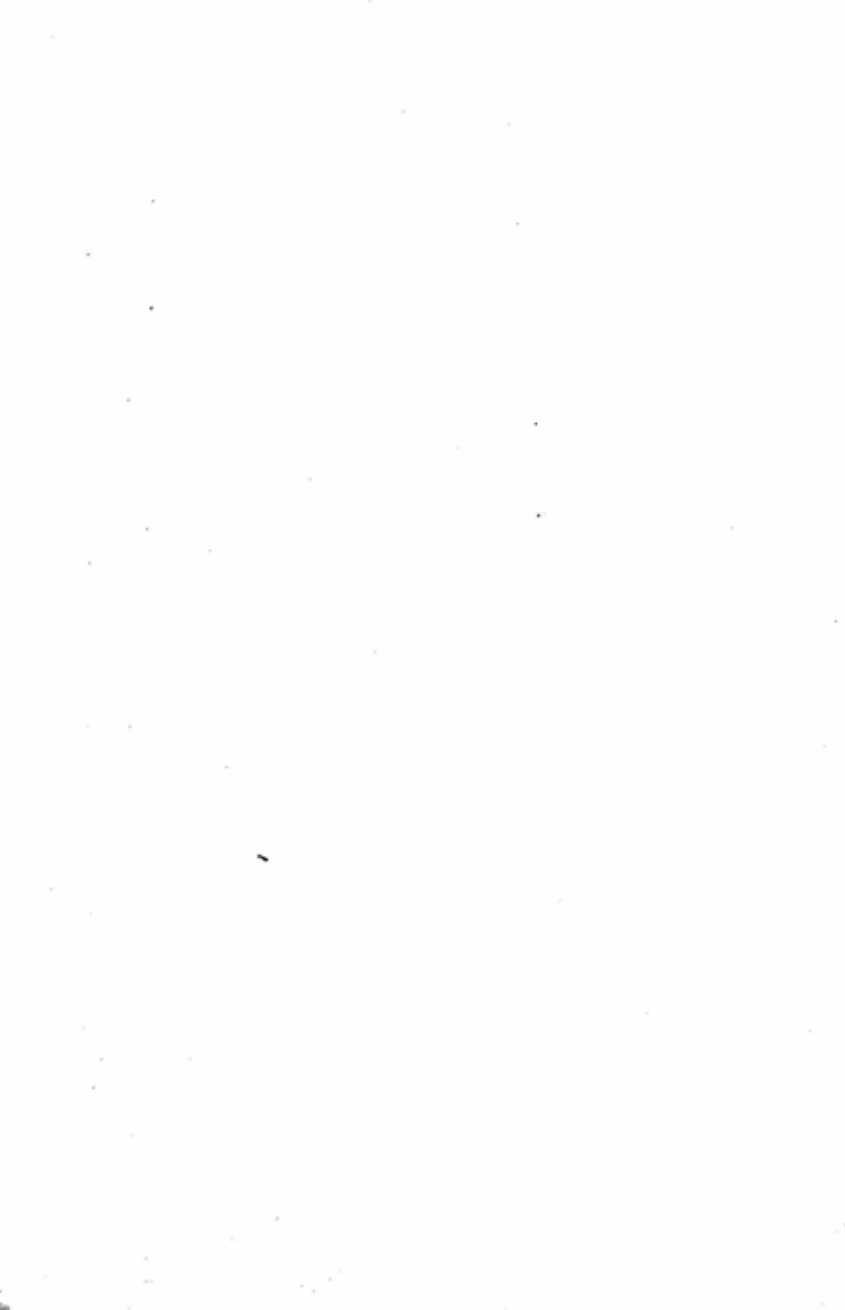
J. R. W. COXHEAD,

Feb., 1959.

Hawkswood, Nr. Honiton.

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\* Both books were published by B. T. Batsford Ltd., of London.



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## CHAPTER I

# TRADITIONS CONNECTED WITH SIR FRANCIS DRAKE

MANY legends and traditions cluster around the name of the immortal Devonian, Sir Francis Drake. Some of these stories undoubtedly possess a certain amount of historical truth, but as they cannot be confirmed by reliable documentary evidence they are classed as traditions. On the other hand, there are several tales connected with the great sailor which are of a highly fantastic and improbable nature, and must be considered as legends of a purely mythical character.

Perhaps it would be as well to commence with traditions, and conclude the chapter with some of the tales of a legendary type.

On 4th April, 1581, Drake was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I, in honour of his epic voyage round the world. The ceremony took place at the end of a splendid banquet held on board his weatherbeaten ship the *Golden Hind*. He was now a very famous man. Tradition relates that, wishing to have a coat-of-arms to match his title, he was foolish enough to assume the armorial bearings of the ancient family of Drake of Ashe, near Musbury in East Devon. To Sir Bernard Drake of Ashe, who considered the relationship of his family to the great sailor to be rather hazy, the action was unforgivable. Furious with the impudence of a man who to him was an upstart, Sir Bernard sought for Sir Francis in the precincts of the Court, and upon finding him soundly boxed his ears. The men of the first Elizabethan period were impetuous and high-spirited; and it is difficult to imagine how a bold and hardy sailor like the admiral avoided striking back. The affair caused a frightful scandal at Court, and

Sir Francis, with his ear still smarting, complained to the Queen with whom he was in high favour.\*

It is hard to say how much truth there is in the story, but most traditional tales contain a certain amount of fact. However, whether the quarrel occurred or not, the Queen granted Sir Francis a completely new coat-of-arms of which he may well have been proud. The shield is sable with a fesse wavy between two polar stars argent. The Crest is a ship under reef, drawn round the globe with a cable-rope by a hand out of the clouds, and over it this motto—*Auxilio divino* ; and under it, *Sic parvis magna*.

It is said that Sir Francis, as an act of derision, included in the crest a wyvern hanging upside-down in the rigging of the ship. A wyvern was the armorial bearing of the Drakes of Ashe. The man who had become the scourge of the Spanish Main and the greatest sailor of his day could now safely tease his arrogant kinsman.

Mary Newman, Drake's first wife, who had seen her husband rise from a position of comparative obscurity to one of dazzling wealth and renown, died in January 1583, shortly after his purchase of the Buckland Abbey estate in Devon. His marriage to his second wife, Elizabeth Sydenham, daughter of Sir George Sydenham, of Coombe Sydenham, took place in 1585.

It is said that the Sydenham family were very much against the marriage because, although the Queen had conferred a knighthood upon the intrepid navigator, and he was now an extremely rich man, by birth he was, in their opinion, no match for a member of an aristocratic family like the Sydenhams of Coombe Sydenham in Somerset.

There is a possibility that Sir George Sydenham endeavoured to find another suitor for his daughter's hand while Drake was away, because a rather intriguing little legend relates that Elizabeth, tired of waiting for her roving lover, became betrothed to another man.

On the day the wedding was appointed to take place a great throng of guests assembled in Stogumber Church, and just as the bridal party was about to enter the ancient

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\* "Worthies of Devon," by John Prince. (1810 edition) p. 329.

building, there was a blinding flash in the sky, followed by a thunderous report, and a huge cannon ball hurtled through the air and fell to the ground at the feet of the prospective bride.

This decidedly alarming event was taken by Elizabeth as a sure sign of Drake's profound displeasure. She was firmly convinced that by some powerful supernatural means the famous sailor had become aware of the course she was about to take, and had fired one of the great guns on his ship in an effort to stop the wedding. Needless to say, the ceremony was immediately cancelled, and on the following day Drake arrived to claim his bride.

The celebrated "cannon ball" still occupies an honoured place in the hall at Coombe Sydenham. It is considered to be a large meteorite, weighs about a hundredweight, and is as big as a football.\*

Of all the countless traditions that have been handed down through the centuries concerning the many gallant heroes belonging to the English race, few are more popular, or more widely known, than the famous story of Drake and the game of bowls.

The year 1588 was a fateful one for England. The people were awaiting with stalwart courage, mixed with a certain amount of excusable apprehension, the coming of King Philip of Spain's mighty Armada. The English fleet, under the command of Lord Howard of Effingham, with Sir Francis Drake as Vice-Admiral, was lying at anchor in Plymouth Sound waiting for a favourable breeze in order to issue forth in search of the enemy ships and bring them to battle.

During this period of enforced inaction, the English fleet was engaged in the task of taking aboard stores and ammunition, and carrying out all necessary repairs so that it would be in a complete state of readiness for the coming fray; and it was at this time that the events recounted in the celebrated tradition are supposed to have taken place.

According to the story, just after dinner on 19th July, 1588, Lord Howard and his chief officers were playing a

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\* "Exmoor Wanderings," by E. R. Delderfield, pp. 83—85.

game of bowls on Plymouth Hoe. Drake, with his wood poised in his hand, was just about to play when suddenly Thomas Fleming, Captain of a pinnace named the Golden Hind, arrived in breathless haste with the startling news that the great Armada had been sighted off the Lizard.

For a short space after the dramatic announcement had been made a deep silence fell upon the assembled company, and then all faces were turned towards Drake, who, eyeing the jack intently, calmly remarked: "We have time enough to finish the game and beat the Spaniards afterwards."

There is very good reason for thinking that the story may be quite true, because it is well in keeping with Drake's character that he should have endeavoured, at such an anxious moment, to inspire everyone with his own firm confidence of victory in the forthcoming conflict.

The purely legendary lore connected with Sir Francis Drake is best introduced by an extract from Christina Hole's fine book, "English Folk-Heroes":—

"One curious tradition links him directly with the old Celtic god, Manannan, son of Ler. This god by magic could make chips of wood thrown into the sea appear like ships of war. Legend says that Drake was once sitting on the Devil's Point at Plymouth whittling a stick. As the shavings fell into the water below him, they turned into full-sized ships, not mere glamorous appearances like those of Manannan, but real vessels, fully rigged and ready for action whenever their creator and master should require them."

There were many people in Devon who believed that he was highly skilled in the art of magic. This belief was due, perhaps, to the rapid way in which he had risen to fame and fortune. One legend tells how an acute shortage of water, during the latter part of the sixteenth century, forced the laundry women of Plymouth to send their clothes to Plympton to be washed. As soon as Drake heard about their trouble he mounted his steed and rode away to a remote part of Dartmoor, where, after searching for a time, he discovered a wonderful spring of crystal-clear water. Having woven a strong enchantment around

the spring, he leapt upon his horse and galloped back to Plymouth, and a lovely stream of limpid water followed him all the way into the town.

Another very strange legend about the great admiral states that his apparition is supposed to drive over Dartmoor, at certain times, in a black coach drawn by headless horses, and followed by a pack of black hounds whose fierce baying causes the death of any earthly dog that hears it.\*

On 28th August, 1595, Drake sailed away on what was destined to be his last voyage. He died on board his ship the *Defiance* on 28th January, 1596, off Puerto Bello. According to a stirring legend, as he lay dying he gave instructions that the ship's drum was to be taken back to England, and hung up in Buckland Abbey. There it would become endowed with magical properties, and whenever England was threatened by enemy attack it would beat of its own accord, and upon hearing the warning roll of the drum he would hasten at once to his country's aid.

Until quite recently there have been people in Devon who have believed that the renowned sailor has returned on several occasions to fight for his country, and that both Blake and Nelson were reincarnations of the famous Devonian.†

These legends and traditions indicate how deeply Drake's spirit of high adventure, and his strong love for England, impressed his fellow countrymen. There is also something else of outstanding interest, suggested by the last two stories. The fact that he is supposed to possess the mystic power of being able to return to the aid of his country in time of war means that he has joined the ranks of the undying heroes of world folklore, and now takes his place with such exalted paladins as King Arthur, Charlemagne, Wild Edric and Frederick Barbarossa, all of whom are reputed to issue forth from the grey mists of time, at the head of their armoured warriors, to the assistance of their respective countries at times of desperate peril.

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\* "Haunted England," by Christina Hole, pp. 139-140.

† "English Folk-Heroes," by Christina Hole, p. 25.

## CHAPTER II

# LEGENDS OF NORTH DEVON

### THE RAISED DRAWBRIDGE

THE long and straggling village of Combe Martin in North Devon is situated in a warm and fertile valley which runs down to a sheltered cove flanked on either hand by fine cliffs.

The manor was given by William the Conqueror to one of his followers named Martin de Tours. The property continued to be possessed by the Martin family until the death of Nicholas Martin in 1328.\* As he left no surviving male heir the estate eventually passed to the Audley family through the marriage of his aunt Joan to Nicholas, Lord Audley of Helegh in Staffordshire.

A very sad legend has been handed down through the centuries in memory of the last of the Martins of Combe Martin. According to the story the family lived in a strong moated house near the church. The moat was wide and deep, and was spanned by a drawbridge which was raised regularly at nightfall. This was a very necessary precaution in those days because of the presence among the wild Exmoor hills of bands of outlaws and robbers.

Like many young men in his position in mediaeval times, the Lord of the Manor's only son was extremely fond of the pleasures of the chase. One day, he rode forth alone from his father's house to hunt the red deer on the high hills with some friends who lived some distance away. The chase led the eager huntsmen far into a remote part of Exmoor, and when the hunt was over twilight

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\* Transactions of the Devonshire Association, Vol. 45, p. 200.

was already falling fast. The lad said farewell to his friends and set off on the long homeward journey through the gathering darkness.

As his son did not return at nightfall the Lord of the Manor thought that he must be spending the night with his friends and would not return until the following day, so he gave his servants the usual order for the drawbridge to be raised.

Whether the long day's hunting had made the youth unduly tired, or whether he was riding without due care, will never be known, but apparently he failed to notice in the darkness that the drawbridge was up, with the result that both he and his tired steed plunged headlong to their doom in the dark depths of the moat.

The following morning when the drawbridge was lowered the servants found the lad's dead body, together with that of his horse, entangled in a patch of clinging weed in the cold waters of the moat.

It is recorded in the legend that when the Lord of the Manor of Combe Martin heard of his young son's death, he was filled with bitter grief and remorse.

Finding it impossible to continue to live in a house associated with so tragic a memory, he gave orders for the building to be levelled to the ground, and he himself left the district never to return again.

\* \* \* \*

Evidence pointing to the existence in bygone days of a moated manor house at Combe Martin, is to be found on page 105 of a scarce little book entitled, "The North Devon Scenery-Book," by George Tugwell, M.A., which was published in 1863.

## THE DOONES OF BADGWORTHY

The story of the Doones of Badgworthy on Exmoor has gained widespread fame through the book "Lorna Doone," written by Richard Doddridge Blackmore and first published in 1869.

Some people still think that the Doones never really



existed but were cleverly invented by the novelist in order to provide a number of lawless and exciting characters for his book. This view is entirely wrong as legends about the Doones existed in the Exmoor district long before the year 1869.

In an article in the Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the year 1903, the Rev. J. F. Chanter stated that he could remember seeing a manuscript describing the wild exploits of the Doones which was dated 1842, and also that when he was at school in 1863, a boy from the Exmoor neighbourhood used to tell the most hair-raising tales about the Doones in the dormitory after lights-out.

Most of these stories had been handed down by an old woman named Ursula Johnson, reputed to be a witch, who died in 1826 at the age of 88. When the Rev. Matthew Mundy became Vicar of Lynton in 1833 he made a collection of the stories, and several copies of the manuscript were made by the senior girls of the National School at Lynton under the supervision of Miss Spurrier, the mistress. It is believed that one of the copies of the manuscript came into Blackmore's possession, and gave him the idea of writing the book, "Lorna Doone."

In his youth Blackmore spent many of his holidays staying with his uncle, the Rev. Richard Blackmore, at Charles Rectory among the foothills of western Exmoor, and while he was there he must have heard many of the traditions of the district which he later used so skilfully to produce his delightful and romantic story about the Doones of Badgworthy.

The following version of the legend of the Doones, largely drawn from notes made by the Rev. Matthew Mundy about the year 1835, is taken from an article by the Rev. J. R. Chanter, entitled "Lorna Doone," which appeared in "The Western Antiquary," Vol. III, in 1884:—

"Among the extensive tracts of mountain which surround the forest of Exmoor, far from the habitations of man, and scarce known by name to any but the semi-barbarous shepherd, or the huntsman, is the beautiful wood of Badgeworthy, commonly called Badgery. Though still

one of the most favourite haunts of the forest deer, it has been decreasing in size for many years, and its former boundaries, as pointed out by some of the older shepherds, far exceed its present dimensions. The ruins of a sort of rude village, long forsaken and deserted, may be traced in an adjoining valley, which, before the destruction of the timber, must have been a spot exactly suited to the wants of its wild inhabitants. Tradition states that it consisted of eleven cottages, and was, about the time of the Commonwealth, the dwelling-place of the Doones, a daring and successful gang of robbers who were the terror of the country around, and who, for a long time, escaped undetected among the wild bleak hills of Exmoor, where few thought it safe, or even practicable, to follow them. They were not natives of this part of the country, but having been disturbed by the Revolutions, suddenly entered Devon, and erected the village alluded to.

"It was known, from the first, by the inhabitants of the neighbouring parishes, that the place was inhabited by robbers, but the fear which their deeds inspired in the minds of the peasants, prevented them from interfering. The idea was prevalent that, before leaving their previous homes, they had been men of distinction, and not common peasants. Only a few accounts of the actions of the Doones have been collected, and are as follows :—

"The site of a house may still be seen on a part of the forest called the Warren, which is said to have belonged to a person styled "The Squire," who was robbed and murdered by the Doones.

"A farmhouse called Yanworthy, near the Lynton and Porlock-road, was beset by them one night, but a woman firing on them from an upper window, with a duck-gun, they retreated ; and blood was tracked the next morning for several miles in the direction of Badgery. (A very ancient gun, nearly nine feet long, with a match-lock, still remains at Yanworthy Farm, which was purchased by the late Mr. Halliday, and is preserved there as a relic of the Doones, and is suggested to be, the same gun mentioned in the legend).

"They broke into and robbed a house at Exford, in

the evening, just before dark—there was only a woman-servant in the house and a child—the woman concealed herself in the oven, but the Doones murdered the child, and the woman from her concealment heard them make to the infant the barbarous remark, which has ever since been kept alive as a couplet in the district :—

“If any one asks who killed thee,  
Tell 'em 'twas the Doones of Badgery.”

“It was for this murder that the whole country rose in arms against them, and, going to their village in great haste, succeeded in capturing or destroying the whole gang.”

The foregoing story is the earliest known version of the legend of the Doones, and was recorded by the Rev. Matthew Mundy, Vicar of Lynton, from the scanty fragments of tradition that he managed to collect from some of the older inhabitants of Exmoor between the years 1833 and 1838.

Although the information contained in the legend is woefully brief, its simplicity, and complete lack of fantastic detail, are strong reasons for thinking that it is largely true.

It is well-known that the passage of time tends to obscure the background of fact which lies behind most legends. As the years go by further details are added to a tradition until it becomes a hard task to separate fact from fiction. During the second half of the nineteenth century the story of the Doones acquired much additional detail of a very fanciful type, and Mr. Chanter gives an excellent example of this by showing how the murder of the child at Exford, mentioned in the original legend, had grown into a worse deed by 1864 :—

“This incident is also related in a graphic article on Exmoor which appeared in “Fraser's Magazine,” more than twenty years ago, and professed to have been told to a tourist by a peat-cutter on the moor, but whose tale had unmistakably received considerable literary dressing. The Doones are there described, as “a fierce gang of marauders, infamous in woodland story, at whose names the Exmoor children quake, and repent them full sore

of their evil deeds." One stormy day, these ancient freebooters appeared before a lone barton and burst the frail protection of bolt and bar, knowing that the farmer was absent. Only a little child and a servant girl were left in the house, and their fate was quickly determined. The girl, more discreet than valorous, hid herself in the oven, which was of patriarchal size, and, for her sake, one may trust, was not hot. From the hiding place she heard the remainder of the story.

"The Doones being very hungry and not over nice, finding nothing eatable in the cupboard, laid hands on the unfortunate infant—cooked him and ate him with much unction and dispatch, and whilst they washed down his remnants with some of his father's old ale, chanted the following refrain, by way, one may suppose, of dirge and epitaph:—

"If any one ask who 'twas that eat thee,  
Tell them—the Doones of Badgeworthy."

"If this is not a pure invention of the writer of the article in "Fraser," it shows how largely traditions vary and extend themselves in the telling, when they even change robbers into cannibals."

The above version of the Exford murder serves as a very good example of the way in which a particular part of a tradition can become distorted during the passage of time. Therefore, it can easily be understood that the task of picking out historical facts from some of the older legends of Devon is by no means a simple matter.

All that may be gathered from the meagre scraps of material contained in the original version of the legend, is the information that during the unsettled period following the defeat of the Royalists in the Civil War, a band of lawless men known as the "Doones" migrated to Devon from some other part of the country, and having established themselves in one of the wildest parts of Exmoor, proceeded to live by robbing and plundering their neighbours.

The legend of the Doones, much embellished with additional material of a fictitious character, is now enshrined for all time in R. D. Blackmore's delightful romance, "Lorna Doone."

## THE ENCHANTED STEED

One of the most colourful characters in R. D. Blackmore's charming romantic novel, "Lorna Doone," is the famous West Country highwayman Tom Faggus.

Many exciting tales have been handed down over the years by people living on Exmoor, describing the daring exploits of this dauntless but kind-hearted robber.

According to legend, Faggus owed his great success as a highwayman to the timely aid he so often received from his celebrated strawberry horse. This wonderful steed was supposed to have been endowed by the fairies with supernatural powers, and is said to have rescued Faggus from many a tight corner.

The following version of the legend of the strawberry mare by the Rev. J. R. Chanter has been taken from "The Western Antiquary," Vol. III:—

"Faggus was a native of North Molton, and by trade a blacksmith, but having engaged in a law-suit, he was ruined and obliged to leave his home. He then turned gentleman-robber, and for many years collected contributions on the highways, sometimes in company with a person called Penn, but more frequently alone. Many stories are current about his famous enchanted strawberry horse which rescued him from all sorts of dangers, and it was chiefly through this that Faggus escaped for so great a length of time. On one occasion, a large party of farmers arranged to ride home from Barnstaple Fair together, expressly to avoid Faggus, who was said to be then on the road. However, when they arrived at Leworthy post on the top of Bratton Down, Faggus rode up—a cocked pistol in each hand—and the reins lying loose on the neck of his strawberry horse, and threatened them with instant death, if they did not deposit their moneybags at the foot of the post. The farmers all obeyed in silent awe, and Faggus rode off with the booty. He was once seized whilst sitting at an ale-house at Simonsbath, but, at his shrill whistle, his invaluable horse broke down the stable-door, rushed into the house, and after seriously maltreating the constables with his hoofs and teeth bore off his master in triumph.

"He was at one time recognised in Barnstaple and closely pursued to the bridge, where he was met by constables who blocked up the other end. Seeing his escape thus cut off, he boldly put his horse to the parapet of the bridge, which he cleared, and swam off down the river and escaped.

"Intelligence being received at Exford that Faggus would pass that way at a certain time, a number of men were stationed by the road to seize him. They had not been long at their post when Faggus rode up in a complete disguise. "Pray, my good friends," says he, "May I ask for what purpose you are gathered here in such numbers?" On being answered that they were waiting to catch Faggus, he replied that he knew him well for a great rascal, and volunteered to wait and help them in arresting him. After a little more conversation, he asked what firearms they had, and then suggested that they should be discharged, as the dampness of the morning might have injured the powder and priming. This advice was followed and directly the guns were put *hois-de-combat*, he produced his pistols, and having declared his name, robbed his terrified adversaries and galloped away.

"It being discovered that he was concealed in a house at Porlock, the inhabitants assembled, armed themselves with guns, pitchforks, scythes, and other rustic weapons, surrounding the house in formidable array, shouting, "Faggus is taken!" But they were mistaken, for the door suddenly opening, he rushed forth on his strawberry horse, and dashing through the crowd, regardless of the blows and shots aimed at him from all sides, disappeared—leaving them agape at his daring.

"He was at length captured in an alehouse at Exbridge, in the following manner:—He was tracked there, and a constable, equipped as an old beggar-woman, entered the room where Faggus was sitting drinking, who, with his usual kindness, ordered the vagrant some liquor. However, at a pre-concerted signal, the constable knocked the chair from under Faggus, and others rushed in before he could recover his legs, fastened one end of a rope to his feet, and hoisted him up to the bacon-rack. He gave his shrill whistle, but it was in vain; at the same moment that his

master was secured, the poor horse was shot in the stable, for it was the common belief that he could never be injured while the enchanted horse lived.

"All was now over with poor Faggus; he was hanged at Taunton at the next Assizes. Throughout his whole career, not one act of cruelty was ever laid to his charge, and many were the benefits he conferred on sick and distressed persons. Like Robin Hood, he took from the rich and gave to the poor."

Towards the end of his exciting and eventful career Tom Faggus lived in a house called "Yeoland" in the parish of Swimbridge, about four miles from Barnstaple. When he was arrested the property was confiscated by the Crown, and the Royal coat-of-arms was placed on the house. This coat of arms, in heavy cast metal, together with a circular horse-shoe reputed to have belonged to the highwayman's celebrated enchanted steed, are still to be seen in the old house at Swimbridge.

A gun which once belonged to Tom Faggus is preserved at St. Anne's Chapel Museum, in Barnstaple, and serves as a memorial to a man who, although a robber, was also a kind-hearted and lovable character.

## THE FAIRY FORT

The details for the following charming little fairy-tale have been taken from a rare book entitled "The North-Devon Scenery-Book," which was written by the Rev. George Tugwell, M.A., in 1863. The author of the book obtained the story from a moorland peat-cutter in whose humble cottage he spent a night while on a fishing holiday.

An ancient tradition, handed down by countless generations of moorland folk, relates that long, long ago the fairies were at war with the dwarfish earth-spirits who lived underground all about the forest of Exmoor, and the wild hill-country on its borders.

Now, the fairies being perfectly harmless little people, and good-natured to excess, were by no means a match for the spiteful and ill-tempered earth-demons, who were always hatching evil plots in their dark and gloomy under-

ground habitations in order to overcome the kindly and good-hearted little pixies.

At length, after many years of strife, the Queen of the Fairies, who, like most women, was extremely resourceful, evolved a plan by means of which the fairy-folk would be delivered from the unbearable tyranny of their heartless oppressors.

Ever since the days when Merlin, the greatest of all wizards, cast mighty spells in the western lands, the numbers three and seven, running water, and above all the mysteries of the emblematic circle, have proved to be a potent protection against the cunning machinations of the prince of darkness and his evil-minded allies. With this in mind the Queen of the Fairies assembled all her subjects, and instructed them to build a mysterious circle on the summit of one of the highest hills on Exmoor.

The site chosen by the Queen for the fairy fortress was in an extremely strong position overlooking the valleys of three rapidly flowing streams, and commanding wide views of the surrounding country at all points.

Now, the building which the pixies erected was no ordinary building, for with every stone and turf that the builders laid they buried the memory of some kindly deed which the fairy-folk had done to the race of men, and by the end of the day, when the magic ring was completed, the "little people" possessed a stronghold which was so securely protected by powerful spells that when the earth-demons tried to gain an entry during the night they were completely baffled, and were forced to give vent to their frustration and fury by dancing and raving with rage around the enchanted enclosure throughout the hours of darkness.

As the grey light of dawn broke upon the wide expanse of Exmoor, and the swirling mists drifted apart to reveal the wild solitude of the high places, ring after ring of the faintest amber-tinted vapour rose up from the fairy stronghold, and floated away into the brightening sky, each on its own mission of safety and peace.

All the hill-folk, who beheld the wondrous sight, knew that the good little fairies were celebrating their great



victory over the powers of darkness by sending kindly thoughts far and wide into the surrounding countryside to comfort all those in sorrow and distress.

The tiny amber-tinted wreathlets floated hither and thither all over the broad expanse of the moorland country of North Devon and West Somerset, and wherever the grass was greenest and softest, and the little streams sang most merrily, and in all those places where the sunlight was purest, and the moonbeams brightest, there these enchanted circles of fairy mist sank down softly on patches of level greensward leaving no trace behind them of what they had been, or from whence they had come.

After a while, however, from each soft resting place there sprang a magic ring of the greenest and lushest grass, which flourished and grew year by year, and within each verdant circle the happy little pixies danced gaily on moonlit nights in peace and security, unharmed by the sinister earth-spirits, who were never again seen above ground after their power had been broken during their unsuccessful attack on the fairy stronghold on that memorable night when the forces of light triumphed over the forces of darkness.

## THE DOOM OF SHILSTON UPCOTT

The church of St. Pancras at Broadwoodwidge stands in a commanding position on a steep hill overlooking the valley of the River Wolf, in the southern part of North-West Devon, and magnificent views of the heights of Dartmoor may be obtained from the churchyard on a clear day.

This interesting old church contains traces of late Norman work in the lower parts of the north wall of the nave and transept. The chancel arch is of early thirteenth century date, and the unbuttressed west tower was added towards the end of the fourteenth century. The south aisle retains its original roof with carved bosses and wall-plates, the font is of the Norman period, and the building

also contains a complete set of carved oak bench-ends, one of which bears the date 1529.

Perhaps the most intriguing object in the church is a mutilated effigy of a knight, clad in a curious type of plate-armour, situated in a recess in the east wall of the aisle. According to tradition, the effigy is supposed to represent a certain Shilston Upcott, who was lord of the manor of Broadwood in Tudor times, and lived in a mansion called Upcott about a mile from the village.

The remains of the old manor house, consisting of a few mullioned windows, the porch, and a room with a low ceiling supported by oak beams, date from about the second half of the sixteenth century. They now form part of a farmhouse known as Upcott Barton.

Shilston Upcott is reputed to have been an extremely wicked man, and to have oppressed his tenants after the manner of a mediaeval robber-baron. A record of his wild life, and violent death, have been preserved in the neighbourhood of Broadwoodwidge in the following very strange tradition.

The legend relates that a very long time ago the manor of Broadwood was owned by a cruel and vindictive man named Shilston Upcott, who was hated and feared by all who knew him because of his turbulent and tyrannical behaviour.

He was in the habit of stealing cattle from his neighbours, driving them off to other districts and then selling them. Most of the unfortunate neighbours were his own tenants, and they were afraid of complaining about their grievances for fear of being turned out of their farms by their unscrupulous landlord.

One day, when Upcott was in one of his wilder moods, he shot and killed a very valuable cow belonging to a wealthy neighbour.

The following evening, as the rays of the setting sun suffused the distant Dartmoor tors with a delicate red glow of the softest hue, the peaceful stillness of the sleepy Devon countryside was suddenly shattered by the loud report of a gun of fairly heavy calibre.

The ominous sound seemed to come from the vicinity

of the manor house, and the people of the village, much alarmed at such an unusual and startling occurrence, ran as fast as they could to the mansion in order to find out if a calamity had befallen their detested overlord. After thoroughly searching the grounds around the house for some time, they eventually discovered Shilston Upcott lying mortally wounded in a pool of his own blood. He had been almost cut in two by a chain-shot apparently fired from a light cannon, and he died from his ghastly injuries as he was being carried to the house.

The lifeless body of the landowner was taken up to his bedroom and laid on the bed, and messengers were hastily dispatched to acquaint his relatives of the tragedy.

When his kinsfolk arrived they were at once taken up to the bedroom to see the corpse, but to everyone's profound astonishment the only sign of the recent crime was a heap of blood-stained bedclothes—the body of Shilston Upcott had completely vanished!

After many hours of exhaustive search the corpse was discovered in the well, but how it came to be there remained a mystery.

Owing, perhaps, to his wicked deeds during life, and his unusually violent end, Upcott's spirit was unable to rest. For many years after the crime his ghost haunted the bedroom, and at night screams and the sound of shooting were heard coming from the disused apartment. Frightful noises, as though horses were being ridden up the stairs to the room, were also frequently heard, and finally the chamber was permanently closed and it has not been entered for many years.

To this day, there is a chamber in the farmhouse known as the "haunted room." It is long, rather narrow and open to the roof rafters. The door which gave access to the room from the staircase was sealed up a very long time ago. The room has one small unglazed window which now looks into a dairy of comparatively recent construction. Unless a ladder is used it is impossible to see through the window into the apartment. It seems rather an odd thing that Shilston Upcott should have chosen such an extremely gloomy room as his bedroom

when there must have been several much more pleasant rooms in the house. However, since the chamber was sealed up there have been no reports of ghostly phenomena.

The well into which the body of the murdered man is said to have been thrown is in the floor of the pantry. It is now filled in, and, assuming the pantry to be a later addition, it would have been outside the house in Tudor times.

\* \* \* \*

The foregoing legend is also recorded in "Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries," Vol. 20, pp. 362—364.

### THE DEVIL'S COURTSHIP

Once upon a time there lived near the village of Marwood, in North Devon, a young woman named Molly. She was employed on a certain large farm in the parish as a maid servant, and although she was reasonably comely to look upon no man had yet come into her life. The other servants continually teased the poor girl because she had no lover, and prophesied that she would end her days as a spinster. Molly, however, had very different ideas on the subject, and had no intention of remaining single. She was determined to get herself a lover even if it should be none other than the Devil himself.

One fine day in September, Molly decided to go to Barnstaple Fair, and she made up her mind that, come what may, she would return home that night with a sweetheart.

Now the young maiden had been extremely rash in considering the Devil as a possible sweetheart, because as everybody knew quite well, according to an old tradition, the Devil was in the habit of visiting Barnstaple Fair every year disguised as a handsome and dashing young gallant.

The whole of the day Molly spent at the Fair, but her search for a lover was unsuccessful, and as the evening drew on she reluctantly turned her weary feet towards home. Her heart was heavy with sadness at the failure of her quest, and she dreaded the thought of

having to face the jeering taunts of the other servants the following day.

Molly had not been long on her homeward journey when she was overtaken by a handsome swarthy young man with flashing eyes, and a fine tenor voice. He was a complete stranger to the girl, and in the course of conversation told her that his name was Will Easton, but oddly enough he would not divulge his place of habitation. He escorted her to the farm where she worked, and told her that he would see her again in a few days' time.

True to his word the young man came to see Molly again, and was kindly received by the farmer's wife, who told him he would always be welcome at the farm. From then onwards he paid frequent visits to the farm to see the girl, and the maiden's lonely heart was filled with happiness at the pleasant thought that at long last she possessed a sweetheart.

Will Easton's fine tenor voice was a great asset, and he would often delight the farmer and his household by singing them many a merry song, but there was one very strange thing about him—the moment the lamps were lit in the great farmhouse kitchen he would suddenly disappear.

However, in spite of the weird way in which the young man would vanish from sight whenever the lamps were brought into the room at dusk, the ardent courtship continued.

One stormy night a frightful noise was heard as though a number of men were threshing with heavy flails on the roof of the farmhouse. The farmer and his servants made every effort to discover the cause of the turmoil but without success. Eventually, they entered Molly's room on the top floor of the house, and to their great consternation they found the terrified girl wedged between her bed and the wall in such a manner that nobody was able to go near her, or help her, in her unfortunate plight.

The farmer gathered together ten men, and in spite of all their combined efforts they were unable to release the poor maiden from the powerful spell that enfolded her. Twelve parsons then endeavoured to rescue her from the

satanic enchantment, but all to no avail. At last, the farmer sent a message to the learned and venerable Rector of Ashford, asking him to come as swiftly as possible to thwart the power of the demon. The pious priest quickly arrived on the scene, and being a great scholar soon outwitted the prince of darkness. He asked the demon if he wished for the immediate possession of his prey, or whether he would wait until the candle which had just been lighted had burnt out. The unwary spirit decided to wait until the candle was entirely consumed, but the cunning parson blew it out, and carefully placed it in a box which was then built into the wall of Marwood Church.

The spell was now broken, and Molly was released from the clutches of the Devil, who had been courting her for the sake of her soul.

The foregoing legend is strangely silent regarding Molly's further adventures and one hopes that she eventually married one of the men on the farm and lived happily ever afterwards.

\* \* \* \*

A version of this story, entitled "The Marwood Legend," is to be found in Vol. 24, of "Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries."

## CHAPTER III

# LEGENDS OF DARTMOOR

### CHILDE'S TOMB

ON the Ordnance Survey map of Dartmoor there is a spot marked as Childe's Tomb. The place is situated on a slope of the moor beneath Fox Tor and overlooking the marshy valley of the Swincombe river. A cross of hewn granite standing on the lonely hillside occupies the site of an earlier memorial which, according to tradition, was erected to commemorate Childe's death.

Attached to this wild and desolate spot is a legend dating from Saxon times. According to the earliest version of the legend there lived at Plymstock a wealthy landowner named Childe, who, being without issue, made a will in which he bequeathed his estates to whichever church should receive his body for burial.

One bitterly cold winter's day Childe, accompanied by several followers, rode forth on a hunting expedition into the frost-bound wilderness of Dartmoor. After a time, it so happened that he became separated from his companions, and during his efforts to rejoin them he became hopelessly lost. Meanwhile, the weather had become considerably colder, and realizing that he was in great danger of freezing to death he killed his horse, disembowelled it, and crept into its stomach in order to keep warm. The cold was so intense that his desperate action was of no avail, and there, within the body of his slaughtered steed, he died.

The next day parties of men from various places searched the moor for the lost landowner. Childe was eventually found, by the men of Tavistock, frozen to death in the

stomach of his horse. The body of the dead man was carried to Tavistock and buried in the Abbey.

Westcote, who has recorded the legend in his book, "View of Devonshire in 1630," p. 386, relates how the finding of the body by the men of Tavistock "was not so privily done but the inhabitants of his own parish of Plymstock had intelligence thereof, and so mustered their best strength to prevent the other, and came with a great multitude to the passage of the river, which of necessity the Tavistock men must pass, or nowhere, as they thought, and there waited; but they were deceived by a feat of guile, for the Tavistock inhabitants builded presently a slight bridge over the river and so without trouble buried the corpse and had the land."

The Rev. John Prince in his "Worthies of Devon" states that when the doomed man realised his death was approaching he wrote on a granite boulder, with the blood of his dead steed, these words:—

"He that finds, and brings me to my tomb,  
The land of Plimstock shall be his doom."

It is a well-known fact that most legends contain a certain element of truth, but in the case of the tragic story of Childe's death, the task of finding any historical backing for the tale would appear to be an extremely hard one. Any investigation is confused from the very start by the name "Childe." It is almost certain that it was not the man's real name, but his title, because in late Saxon times, and for some considerable period after the Conquest, the word "Childe" was used as a title of honour. A very good example of this use of the word is to be found in certain early mediaeval romances in which the famous paladin Roland is referred to as "Childe Roland."

Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulty of finding historical backing for the story, Mr. H. P. R. Finberg, in a most interesting chapter in the book "Devonshire Studies,"\* shows that there is good reason to believe that the legend contains a large amount of historical truth, and that the person referred to as "Childe" in the legend was actually a Saxon of high rank named Ordulph. He was the son

\* Published by Jonathan Cape, 30, Bedford Sq., London (1952).



of Ordgar, Ealdorman of the south-western counties, and he founded Tavistock Abbey about the year 973 for monks of the Benedictine order.

### BRENTOR

Four miles north of Tavistock a conical hill composed of volcanic rock, called Brentor, rises to a height of over 1,000 feet above sea-level among the western foothills of Dartmoor.

On the very summit of the tor stands the little church of St. Michael which was originally built about the year 1140 by Robert Giffard at his own cost. He gave the church to the Abbey of Tavistock, together with some land lying around the hill. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was known as "St. Michael of the Rock."

Tristram Risdon, writing early in the seventeenth century, describes the little building as being "all alone, as it were forsaken, whose church yard doth hardly afford depth of earth to bury the dead; yet doubtless they rest there as securely as in sumptuous St. Peters, until the day of doom."

The tiny church, which is built of volcanic rock quarried from the hill on which it stands, measures only 37 feet in length, and 14½ feet in breadth. It consists of a nave and chancel, with a low embattled tower at the western end of the building. The south wall is of the Norman period, the rest of the structure dates from the early part of the thirteenth century, with the exception of the tower which was probably added at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

On the 15th June, 1232, Henry III granted to the Abbot of Tavistock the right to hold a fair for three days, on the vigil, feast and morrow of St. Michael (28—30 Sept.), at the church of Brentor.

The tower-crowned hill of Brentor is an outstanding landmark throughout western Devon, and from its summit magnificent views may be obtained in all directions. Nevertheless, it seems most strange that anyone should choose such an exposed and isolated spot on which to build a church.

An ancient tradition in the district, however, offers a very likely reason why the building should have been placed on such a lofty site.

According to the legend, Robert Giffard was returning to Devon from a foreign country, when his ship was suddenly beset by a terrible tempest. The sails were soon torn to shreds by the fury of the wind ; heavy seas swept the doomed vessel from stem to stern, and the terrified crew gave up all hope of keeping the ship afloat.

Realising that they were in desperate peril, Robert Giffard knelt down on the heaving deck, and, praying fervently to St. Michael for aid, vowed that if the vessel should reach Plymouth Sound safely he would build a church on the top of Brentor in honour of the Saint, and as a landmark for storm-tossed mariners.

Soon after Robert Giffard had made his vow the storm started to abate, and in a short space of time the crew were able to hoist fresh sails and get the ship under control once more.

At length, the badly battered vessel managed to reach the safety of Plymouth Sound, and all the people on board gave thanks to St. Michael for their miraculous deliverance from the fury of the tempest.

True to his vow, Robert Giffard built a little church on the very summit of Brentor in honour of St. Michael, and as a landmark for all mariners wishing to take refuge in Plymouth Sound from the perils of the sea.

The foregoing story serves as an excellent example of the way in which a legend may supply the answer to an intriguing question concerning an established historical fact.

## THE TREASURE OF DOWNHOUSE

About half a mile to the west of the market town of Tavistock, in Devon, there stands a large farmstead called Downhouse. Although the house was rebuilt about the year 1822, the original building was considered to have been an extremely ancient place, and to have possessed a reputation for being haunted by the ghost of a very tall man.

The family who resided at Downhouse before the building was rebuilt, knew by long experience the exact hour of the night at which the ghost made its appearance, and they always took great care to be in bed before the dreaded hour arrived.

Now it happened that one of the children living in the house fell desperately ill, and while the worried mother was watching anxiously by the bedside, the child asked for water. The woman quickly fetched a jug of water which was standing on a table near the bed, but the child refused to drink any of the contents of the jug, and demanded fresh water straight from the pump in the yard.

The little boy's request caused the poor woman great distress as it was just about the time of night the ghost was in the habit of walking.

While the distracted mother was considering what course to take, the sick child again asked fretfully for fresh water from the pump, and, bravely suppressing her fear for the sake of her darling one, the woman exclaimed, "In the name of God I will go down," and she walked swiftly from the room.

As she went down the stairs she fancied she saw a shadow following her, and then she clearly heard footsteps ; and just as she reached the pump she felt a hand on her shoulder. With a start of terror she turned round and saw the shadowy figure of a tall man standing close behind her. Summoning up all her courage she said to the spectre, "In the name of God, why troublest thou me ?" The ghost replied, "It is well for thee that thou hast spoken to me in the name of God ; this being the last time allotted to me to trouble this world, or else I should have injured thee. Now do as I tell thee, and be not afraid. Come with me and I will direct thee to a something which shall remove this pump : under it is concealed treasure."

Whatever the "something" happened to be, when used it enabled the pump to be removed without any great difficulty, and in a cavity thus revealed there lay a great heap of gold and silver coins !

The spectre instructed the woman to take the treasure

and use it to improve the farm, and if anyone were foolish enough to molest her or steal the money, the person concerned would suffer great misfortune.

The ghost then ordered the woman to take fresh water to her sick child, who, as a reward for the mother's great courage and firm trust in God, would soon completely recover from his serious illness.

Suddenly, a cock crowed loudly in the farmyard, and, as though the sound were a signal that the time had come for departure, the apparition became less distinct, rose slowly into the air, and, after assuming the shape of a small bright cloud, gradually disappeared.

The original version of this queer ghost story is to be found in the book, "The Borders of the Tamar and the Tavy," under the date January 8th, 1833.

### THE GHOST OF BENJAMIN GAYER

A long time ago, there lived in the ancient town of Okehampton, at the foot of the highest part of Dartmoor, a wealthy merchant named Benjamin Gayer.

In those distant days, the seamen manning the merchant vessels of the period not only had to face the perils of the sea, but also the danger of frequent attacks by fierce Turkish pirates.

It was Gayer's task to collect money from the inhabitants of Okehampton towards a fund for the ransom of unfortunate mariners who had fallen into the hands of the Turks. Unless the money was forthcoming these poor men were doomed to spend the rest of their lives as galley-slaves in the hands of their cruel captors.

It so happened that when the worthy Benjamin had collected a sum of money sufficiently large to pay for the ransom of a great number of captives, the news arrived that several of his largest ships, heavily laden with merchandise of great value, had been seized by the Turks.

As the bulk of the merchant's wealth was invested in his ships and trading ventures, the news meant that he was ruined unless he could recover his losses from some other quarter.

The other "quarter" was already in his hands. He held the money he had collected for the relief of the captive seamen. Unbeknown to his fellow townsfolk, he secretly took the precious ransom money in order to cover his own losses.

His wicked deed so preyed on his mind that he fell ill, and in a very short space of time he died.

However, the inhabitants of Okehampton had by no means seen the end of Benjamin Gayer. His guilty and uneasy spirit haunted the neighbourhood of his former dwelling-place for many years.

At length the good people of Okehampton could stand the nuisance no longer, so they asked the archdeacon to come to their aid, and lay the ghost.

Realising that the task would be no easy one, the archdeacon gathered together twenty-three members of the clergy from the surrounding district.

One after the other these sage and venerable men commanded the spirit to depart from the town, but it was of no avail. The order was repeated in various languages but the stubborn ghost refused to be daunted. At length a parson more learned than the rest called out to the spirit in Arabic, saying, "Benjamin Gayer, the time has come for you to depart from the town of Okehampton."

The spectre then replied, "Now you have spoken, I must be gone."

The ghost was then compelled to take the form of a colt. A bridle and bit that had never before been used was procured, and one of the best horsemen in the town was instructed to ride him.

The Holy Sacrament of the Church was administered to the rider, and he was ordered to ride the colt to Cranmere Pool, which is situated on one of the most desolate parts of Dartmoor. He was told on no account to allow the colt to turn his head until a portion of the moor known as Okehampton Park had been safely crossed, and when he neared the pool to ride fast down the slope to the water's edge, slip from the colt's back, remove the bridle quickly and let him go.

All this was performed with great dexterity, and the

colt duly plunged into the depths of Cranmere Pool and disappeared never to be seen again.\*

In order to make quite certain that the ghost would be laid for good, the spirit was condemned to make trusses of sand which were to be bound with binds of the same material until the dawn of the Day of Judgment.

\* \* \* \*

Note:—The following interesting entry appears in a seventeenth century journal preserved in the town clerk's office at Okehampton:—

"1670 Nov. Collected by Mr. John Hussey, and Cosin Benjamin Gayer for and towards the relief of poor protestants taken in Turkey, the charity of the inhabitants of this town and parish, and there was gathered ten pounds and odd money."

Benjamin Gayer was Mayor of Okehampton in 1673, 1678, 1684 and 1694. He died on 21st May, 1701.

## THE GREY WETHERS

High up on the windswept expanse of Dartmoor, on the northern side of the road leading from Moretonhampstead to Two Bridges, stands Warren House Inn. The present building was erected in this bleak and lonely situation in order to replace an earlier hostelry which had stood for a great many years on the opposite side of the road. The old tavern, which was called Newhouse, was pulled down because it had fallen into a very dilapidated condition.

A little over two and a half miles to the north-west of the Inn, Sittaford Tor rises to a height of 1,764 feet above sea level, and on the crest of a ridge to the east of the tor there are two prehistoric "Stone Circles" known as "The Grey Wethers." The two circles together contain about sixteen standing and twenty-six fallen stones of grey granite.

There is a rather humorous legend connected with these

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\*Cranmere Pool is reputed to have contained a great deal more water hundreds of years ago than it does at the present day. A reason for the disappearance of the water is given in "The Western Antiquary," Vol. I, p. 95.

stones, which relates that one day, a great many years ago, a wealthy farmer, who was a stranger to the eastern part of Dartmoor, was riding from his farm near Tavistock to Moretonhampstead on business. The day was very warm and sultry, and the journey had made him extremely thirsty. When he saw the little tavern by the side of the road at Newhouse he decided to rest awhile, and partake of some well-needed refreshment.

Dismounting from his weary steed, he tethered the animal in the yard at the back of the building, and then entering the inn he ordered bread, cheese and a quart of ale, requesting at the same time that someone should be sent to attend to his horse.

Several moormen were sitting talking and drinking in the tavern parlour, and while the farmer was eating his bread and cheese they engaged him in conversation.

During the course of the conversation, the yeoman was foolish enough to brag rather a lot about the many shrewd bargains he had made at various times when buying and selling sheep and cattle.

Now it happened that among the moormen was one who was extremely fond of playing practical jokes and, discovering that the farmer was a stranger to the neighbourhood, the man resolved to play a prank on the unsuspecting husbandman in order to teach him not to be so boastful in future.

After several more stoups of ale, the conceited farmer became more and more boastful, and presently, with a sly wink to his companions, the moorman announced that he had 42 grey wethers he wished to sell in a newtake on the eastern side of Sittaford Tor.

By now the slightly bemused yeoman was in a pleasantly expansive mood, and without hesitation he said he would very much like to buy the wethers as he wanted some more sheep on his farm.

Accompanied by his friends, the moorman took the farmer to the top of White Ridge, and pointing to the eastern slope of Sittaford Tor he exclaimed with a note of pride in his voice, "There they be, the little beauties! There they be! Zum be standin' up, an' zum be lyin'

down. They'm the prettiest bunch of wethers in the district."

Puffed up with conceit and good ale, the farmer replied that there was no need for him to go any nearer as he could see they were a nice lot of sheep, and he would very much like to buy them.

The moorman quickly suggested that they should return at once to the inn and strike a fair bargain. To this the yeoman readily agreed, and they all went back to the tavern where, after a certain amount of haggling, they settled upon a price which the farmer paid down on the table in front of the assembled company of secretly exultant moormen.

The following day, on his return journey from Moreton-hampstead, the farmer called at the inn to make arrangements for the sheep he had bought from the moorman to be driven to his farm near Tavistock. He was told, however, that the sheep in question were nothing more than a group of stones known locally as "The Grey Wethers."

The unfortunate yeoman was furious at the way in which he had been thoroughly hoodwinked by the cunning moorman. Nevertheless, he had made a bargain, and he had to stand by it. The adventure had taught him a hard lesson, and he rode home a sadder and wiser man.

## THE SPECTRAL PIGS OF MERRIPIT HILL

Merripit Hill on Dartmoor, rising to a height of 1,474 feet above sea level, is situated about a mile north-east of the spot where the road from Princetown to Moreton-hampstead crosses the East Dart River at Postbridge.

For a very long time, possibly as much as two hundred years, there has been a quaint little legend about a spectral sow and her litter of ghostly pigs attached to an area of the moor lying between Merripit Hill and Cator Gate.

Permission for the story to be included in this book has been kindly granted by Miss Theo Brown, Folk-Lore Recorder to the Devonshire Association. The story was written down and given to Miss Brown in 1951 by Mrs.



Elizabeth Warne, of Lydgate House, Postbridge, who was then 84 years of age, and later it appeared in print in Vol. 83 of the "Transactions of the Devonshire Association."

According to the legend, the ghosts of an old sow and her litter of young pigs may be seen walking across the moor on Merripit Hill, on a dark and foggy night, at certain times of the year.

It appears that the young pigs are very hungry, and the old sow is taking them to Cator Gate where there is the carcase of a dead horse lying on the ground.

As the lean and scraggy apparitions wend their way over the moor, the little pigs are saying plaintively to their mother :—

"Starvin', starvin'."

The old sow replies in urgent tones :—

"Cator Gate, Cator Gate ;

Dead Hoss, Dead Hoss, Dead Hoss."

They travel on through Runnage Bottom, and over Cator Moor until at last they arrive at Cator Gate.

On reaching their destination, the famished creatures find, to their dismay, that they are too late, and only the hide and bones of the dead horse remain. The little pigs all cry despairingly :—

"Skin an' bone, skin an' bone."

The old sow sadly replies :—

"Let 'un lie, let 'un lie."\*

Then, weary and feeble with hunger, they retrace their steps to Merripit Hill, and vanish mysteriously into the darkness and the thickening mist.

Stories about ghostly pigs are to be found connected with several other places in Devon. Part of the estate of Combe House, near Honiton, is said to be haunted, at certain times, by a headless pig, and the ghost of the infamous Judge Jeffreys, in the shape of a large black pig, is supposed to visit the old court-room at Lydford.

Legends concerning the apparitions of various other animals occur frequently in Devon folklore. A black

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\* In the Devon dialect " 'un " is short for " mun " meaning " them."

hound, condemned to perform an endless task, haunts a pool near Buckfastleigh.

The Black Dog of Torrington frequents a stretch of road between Morchard Bishop and Winkleigh. A black hell-hound and headless horses play their parts in the legend known as "The Death Coach of Fitzford House;" and the Demon Huntsman, with his pack of fierce black wisht-hounds, pursues the spirits of unbaptised infants across Dartmoor on wild stormy nights.

The tales about Fitzford House, the Black Hound, and the Demon Huntsman, appear in Chapter II of the author's book, "Legends of Devon," published in 1954.

## CHAPTER IV

# FAIRY-TALES OF DARTMOOR

### PART I.

### THE PIXIES

MANY stories and legends connected with elves and pixies have been recorded from the Dartmoor district. These tales about the "little people" are of the greatest interest to students of Devon folklore. They form part of a great local folk-tradition dating back to prehistoric times, which shrouds with mystery and enchantment a bygone race of small people who once inhabited large areas of the moor.

The origin of the strong tradition in Devon about the existence of pixies is extremely obscure. Several theories on the subject have been put forward at various times, but owing to space restriction, caused by the high cost of printing, only one theory will be mentioned here.

It is considered to be very probable by many authorities on Devon folklore, that pixy legends form part of a deep-rooted folk-memory reaching far back through the centuries to a race of small Bronze Age people known as Iberians, who lived on Dartmoor about 3,500 years ago, and for whom the early Iron Age folk had a strong superstitious fear.\*

The Iberians were a race of short, dark people with harsh features. They lived in low circular huts lined with great slabs of stone backed by a sloping wall of turf. The floors of the huts were usually about two feet below the surface of the ground outside, and the dome-shaped roofs

\* M. I. Ebbutt, "Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race," p. XX; Christina Hole, "Witchcraft in England," pp. 53-54; Arthur Bryant, "The Story of England," p. 40; and H. A. Guerber, "Myths of the Norsemen," p. 245.

were constructed of turf laid over a framework of wood. The diminutive Iberians must have entered their dwellings on their hands and knees because the entrances were not more than three feet high.

To the invading Celts, people who apparently lived in the depths of the earth, and were able to withstand the severe rigours of a moorland winter, must have appeared as beings of a supernatural origin. Therefore, taking everything into account, it would not be surprising if the strange Bronze Age inhabitants of Dartmoor were viewed by their neighbours with considerable awe.

Although these Bronze Age people disappeared from the Moor such a very long time ago, their impact on local tradition was so strong that they have continued to live in the folklore of the district, in the form of mysterious little fairy-folk, known as pixies, right up to the present day.

According to the traditions and beliefs handed down for generations by countryfolk in the Dartmoor area, the pixies, though highly mischievous and playful, were usually helpful to those who were kind to them.

They strongly resented any efforts on the part of human beings to pry into their affairs, and inquisitive people were often punished in various ways for their curiosity.

In appearance they were said to be little elfin creatures, slim of form, and sprightly in their movements. They seem to have varied a good deal in size. In some legends they are spoken of as being about twelve inches in height, while in other tales their stature may be as much as three feet.

Usually they wore no clothing, but sometimes they would be seen clad in gaily coloured apparel, and on other occasions their garments were so tattered that the little creatures looked like bundles of rags.

It was only on very rare occasions that the "little people" allowed human beings to see them; they much preferred to remain invisible. Now and again, however, they would show themselves to someone to whom they owed a debt of gratitude.

As late as the last years of the nineteenth century

many country people still firmly believed that pixies were able to appear or disappear at will, and that they also had the power to cast spells and enchantments.

The mysterious little beings were supposed to live underground in hollow hills, and, according to legend, weird music apparently coming from the depths of the earth has often been heard at certain places on the moor as twilight was falling.

It used to be said that if anyone left a little gift, such as a pin, a small piece of ribbon, or a fragment of brightly-coloured cloth, near one of their meeting-places, the donor would be rewarded in due course.

If a person happened to go too near to a place where pixies were living, the unfortunate interloper would be placed under a spell, and then led well away from the hallowed spot by the indignant little fairies—hence the term “pixy-led.”

Sometimes, however, if the pixies happened to be in one of their particularly mischievous moods they would lead a person astray for the sheer fun of doing so.

Ignis fatuus, called by countryfolk “Will-o’-the-wisp,” or “Jack-a-lantern,” occasionally seen over boggy places, used to be known to Dartmoor people as the “pixy-lights.” They regarded these mysterious lights as traps set by the pixies to lead unwary travellers astray, or even to lure them to their deaths in dangerous bogs or down mine-shafts. These beautiful phosphorescent lights are now considered to be caused by the spontaneous combustion of gas issuing from decaying organic matter. They are very seldom seen nowadays, owing to the fact that the land today is more efficiently drained than it used to be years ago.

The “little people” loved to gather together in a meadow in the moonlight and hold a revel. They would form a circle, join hands, and dance lightly over the glistening dew to the sweet unearthly music of Elfland. In the morning there would be large circles of lush grass, known to the countryfolk as “fairy rings,” where the pixies had danced so merrily during the night.

There used to be a popular belief that pixies delight

in threshing corn at night-time for any farmer they consider deserving of help, and many charming tales have been handed down in the Dartmoor district dealing with this intriguing subject. The earliest reference to the fairy-folk doing such a thing, that the author has been able to discover, appears in the following lines from "L'Allegro," by John Milton (1608—1674):—

"And he by Friars Lanthorn led  
Tells how the drudging Goblin swet,  
To ern his Cream-bowle duly set,  
When in one night, ere glimps of morn,  
His shadowy Flale hath thresh'd the Corn  
That ten day-labourers could not end."

In 1928, a most interesting account, written by Mrs. G. Herbert, of how she saw a pixy on Dartmoor in the year 1897, appeared in Vol. 60 of the "Transactions of the Devonshire Association." Mrs. Herbert described the queer incident as follows:—

"Though I am a grown woman with three sons, I still firmly believe in pixies and in fairies. When a child of seven I saw a pixie, and in recent years I have been 'pisky-led' on Dartmoor.\*

"I saw the pixie under an overhanging boulder close to Shaugh Bridge (on the southern edge of Dartmoor) in the afternoon. I cannot say more definitely as to the time, but I remember running in to my mother after an afternoon walk and saying I had seen a pixie—and being laughed at. This was in 1897.

"It was like a little wizened man about (as far as I can remember) 18 inches or possibly 2 feet high, but I incline to the lesser height. It had a little pointed hat, slightly curved to the front, a doublet, and little short knicker things. My impression is of some contrasting colours, but I cannot now remember what colours, though I think they were blue and red. Its face was brown and wrinkled and wizened. I saw it for a moment and it vanished. It was under the boulder when I looked, and then vanished.

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\* In the Devon dialect the word for pixy is "pisky".

"It was about three years ago when I was "pisky-led." I did not see the pixie, but, although it was a bright, fine day and I was riding on a part of the moor I know well, I was suddenly—to use a Dartmoor expression—"mazed." I knew the places and yet was utterly befogged. I felt I was pixie-led, and started to turn my pockets inside out. While I was doing so, I suddenly knew where I was exactly. I may add that I am psychic, but do not know whether this has anything to do with any pixie experiences."

The turning of one's pockets inside out has always been considered a powerful charm against being pixy-led, and by so doing Mrs. Herbert was simply carrying out a time-honoured remedy for a plight which has befallen travellers on the moor, on many occasions, since the dawn of recorded history, but why such a peculiar act should have any influence over the pixies it is difficult to understand.

According to a comparatively recent tradition, all the fairy-folk have left the country because human beings had been steadily encroaching upon many of their favourite haunts, and it is for this reason that pixies are no longer seen in Devon.

Perhaps it would be as well to conclude this short introduction to the fairy-lore of Devon by comparing some of the traditions about pixies with our information regarding the Iberians.

If a comparison is made between the pixies and the Iberians, several striking similarities will at once be noticed. The Iberians were small folk, and so were the pixies. The former lived in earth-dwellings, while the latter are said to have lived in hollow hills. The only places in Devon where the hut-circles of the Iberians are to be found are on Dartmoor, and it is to the moor, and its borderland, that the majority of pixy legends are attached.

As a result of the comparison there is the strongest indication that all our legends concerning not only pixies, but also dwarfs, earth-gnomes, and goblins, are derived from a persistent folk-memory which reaches back through the mists of the past to a shadowy period in our history

when a mysterious race of small Bronze Age people lived on the bleak windswept heights of Dartmoor.

The six tales that follow have been rewritten from the original legends which are to be found in the book, "Tales of the Dartmoor Pixies," by William Crossing, published in 1890. William Crossing was a great authority on Dartmoor, and he spent many years collecting stories about the pixies from old people living in the neighbourhood of the Moor.

The seventh tale is a version of one of the many stories collected by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould.

### (1) THE HUCCABY COURTING

On the eastern side of the Valley of the West Dart River, just above Hexworthy Bridge, stands a farmstead called Huccaby to which is attached a quaint little pixy legend.

It appears that about a hundred years ago the dairymaid at the farm was a very attractive girl, who was renowned throughout the neighbourhood for her beauty and charm of manner. Naturally enough she had many suitors, but the one she favoured above all others was a handsome young man from Postbridge named Tom White.

The young man was so deeply in love with the winsome dairymaid that he would trudge over the moor from Postbridge to Huccaby, a distance of nearly five miles, several evenings a week in order to be in her company.

One lovely summer night, Tom had stayed with his sweetheart rather longer than usual, and as he climbed the slope behind the farmstead he noticed that the stars were beginning to pale before the approach of dawn.

The young man quickened his pace as he wished to reach his home in time to get some rest before starting his day's work. As he walked along, with his mind full of fond thoughts of the graceful maiden to whom he was so attached, he was paying no attention to the direction in which his steps were leading. Suddenly, he was startled by the sound of merry voices some distance ahead, and to his surprise, he found that he was nearing the rock-strewn summit of Bellever Tor.



Much puzzled as to who could be abroad in so wild a place at such an early hour, he stopped to listen, but the sounds were so faint that he decided he must have mistaken the sighing of the wind for voices, so without wasting any more time he continued on his way.

The great blocks of granite composing the tor assumed uncouth and fantastic shapes in the uncertain light as the young man threaded his way among the rocks, with the intention of passing to one side of the tor. Suddenly, he again heard voices, but this time there was no doubt about the matter, the voices were loud and shrill, and sounded very near at hand.

Pixies! said Tom White to himself as the merry clamour grew louder than ever.

Stepping forward in the direction from which the sounds were coming, Tom peered cautiously round a huge boulder, and the sight which met his astonished gaze caused him to hold his breath in utter amazement.

On a small level space of smooth greensward, entirely surrounded by boulders, a throng of little elves, dressed in fantastic costumes, were gathered together. Many of the little creatures had joined hands, and were dancing in a ring on the velvety turf, while others were perched upon the surrounding rocks, and all were laughing and shouting with the greatest of glee.

The young man was extremely frightened at the extraordinary spectacle he was witnessing, and he decided to beat a hasty retreat. If only he could steal away unobserved he would be able to continue his journey by going round the other side of the tor.

Just as he was about to withdraw he was spotted by the pixies, who immediately formed themselves into a ring around him, and started dancing more merrily than ever.

As the little folk whirled round faster and faster, poor Tom was compelled to do likewise. He soon became tired of twirling round like a top, but found to his extreme consternation that he was unable to stop. When he called to the pixies to cease their antics they only laughed more loudly, and danced at an even greater pace.

Tom began to feel faint, but in spite of all his efforts

he was forced to continue twirling round in the centre of the ring of dancing fairies.

At the height of the mad frolic, the golden rim of the rising sun appeared above the great ridge of Hamel Down. As the first ray of light shone on Bellever Tor all the laughing and shouting ceased, the fairy folk vanished from sight, and the young man found himself lying completely exhausted on the little patch of grassy turf.

Poor Tom White was so overcome by his nocturnal adventure that he vowed he would never go courting again. He was true to his vow because he stopped visiting the dairymaid at Huccaby, and remained a bachelor to the end of his days.

## (2) THE UNGRATEFUL FARMER

Once upon a time there was a farmer who lived on a small farm on the edge of Dartmoor. The depth of soil in his fields was so shallow that he was seldom able to grow anything of any value, and he was so poor that he had the greatest difficulty in providing for his wife and family.

One morning when he approached the door of his modest barn, he was surprised to hear the sound of merry laughter coming from within the building. Putting his ear cautiously to a crack in the door he heard what seemed to be a number of little people busily engaged in threshing corn. Judging them to be pixies, from their shrill cries, he withdrew to the other end of the yard where he worked quietly until he considered the little folk had finished their task.

At length, proceeding to the barn, he peeped inside, and to his great delight he found that the industrious little pixies had threshed as much corn in one day as he himself would be able to do in two.

The farmer was so pleased with what had happened that he decided, on the following day, not to go near the barn until the evening.

When he eventually entered the building he found everything the same as on the previous day. There was a large heap of freshly threshed corn on the floor of the

barn, and to one side all the straw was neatly stacked in little bundles.

Curiosity now overcame the farmer's better judgment, and he made up his mind to watch the little folk at work if he could possibly do so. Knowing that the utmost caution would have to be exercised, he concealed himself in the barn before daybreak the next morning with considerable care.

The farmer had not been in his hiding-place for long before a number of little pixies came running into the building. Some of the little creatures carried flails on their shoulders, and in a few minutes the barn resounded to the noise of the flails and the merry shouts of the elves.

From his place of concealment behind the bundles of straw, the farmer gazed with amazement at the extraordinary scene. All of a sudden one of the pixies dropped his flail and exclaimed in a shrill voice, "I twit, you twit."

Immediately, all the other fairies stopped working, and also threw down their flails. Although the pixies were still ignorant of his presence, the farmer thought, from their behaviour, that he had been discovered, and was extremely annoyed because he knew that the "little people" never return to a place where they have been overlooked by a human being.

When the sprightly little pixy again shouted out in his high-pitched voice, "I twit, you twit," the farmer rushed forth from his hiding-place in a furious temper, crying, "I'll twit'ee! I'll twit'ee! Thee mazed little mommet!"

As soon as the hard-working little fairies saw the ungrateful farmer running towards them they vanished from sight, and never came back to his barn again.

### (3) THE FAIRY THRESHERS

One sunny morning, several hundreds of years ago, a farmer who lived on the borders of Dartmoor was busy working in one of his fields. Suddenly, he heard an excited shout, and his man came running up to him with the news that the "little folk" were hard at work threshing

corn in the barn. The man told the farmer that he had heard voices, and the sound of flails, and, guessing it was the pixies, had not dared to investigate. The farmer told his servant that he was on no account to go near the barn while the fairies were at work, otherside they would never return.

Accordingly, the busy little threshers were allowed to do as they pleased within the building, and only when all sounds of labour had ceased did master and man decide to approach the door. As they peered cautiously into the barn they saw, to their great delight, that there was a large heap of threshed corn on the floor, and, on one side, a stack of neatly bundled straw.

The farmer was extremely grateful for the work the pixies had done, and, being a kind and generous man, he placed some bread and cheese in the barn as an offering to the industrious little elves.

All the servants on the farm were strictly instructed not to enter the building while the fairy folk were at work.

The following afternoon, the farmer and his man entered the barn, and again found that the pixies had done a good morning's threshing. Noticing that all the bread and cheese had disappeared, the farmer ordered his man to place a further supply on the floor of the barn, and to close the door securely.

A week passed by, and the pixies never failed to thresh a goodly quantity of corn each day. The grateful farmer, for his part, never omitted to place a generous supply of bread and cheese in the barn for his faithful little friends.

In a short while all the corn on the farm was threshed, so the farmer naturally thought that the little elves would return no more because their voluntary task was now completed.

However, when he again looked into the barn he was filled with astonishment. There, on the floor of the building was a heap of threshed corn of greater dimensions than ever. The worthy man could hardly believe his eyes. Where had the corn come from? There could be but one answer. The pixies, in gratitude for his generous

hospitality, had brought the corn to the barn by means of a powerful enchantment.

More bread and cheese was placed in the building for the little elves, and the door was again closed. On entering the barn the next day the farmer found yet another heap of corn.

This state of affairs continued month after month. Every day a heap of freshly threshed corn was ready for removal. Years went by, and still the enchanted corn appeared mysteriously in the barn. Having such an abundance of corn to sell at all times of the year, the farmer soon became a wealthy man, but he never forgot his industrious little friends. Every evening a good supply of the finest bread, and a large hunk of the ripest cheese was placed on the floor of the barn as a gift to the mysterious fairy folk who were responsible for the kind old man's prosperity.

#### (4) ELFIN PRIDE

One morning, a great many years ago, an elderly Dartmoor farmer went to his barn with the intention of spending a few hours threshing out some corn.

When he entered the building he found to his great amazement that a sufficient quantity was already threshed and placed in the centre of the floor in readiness for removal.

The worthy man was greatly perplexed when he noticed that the floor all round the heap was swept clean, and the straw stacked on one side in neat bundles.

Hurrying across the yard to the farmhouse, the bewildered old man quickly told his wife about the strange thing that had occurred during the night. After some thought, the good lady came to the conclusion that the pixies were undoubtedly responsible for what had happened.

The next morning, taking up his flail, the farmer again went to the barn with the intention of working on the threshing floor until dinner time.

Upon opening the door he was greatly surprised to find a large heap of corn placed ready for use in the same manner as on the previous day.

Delighted at having so much of his work taken off his hands by the kind little fairies, the farmer hastened once more to the house to tell his wife of the way in which his labours had been lightened, and they both rejoiced together at their good fortune.

Curious to know how the pixies performed their self-imposed task, the old man decided to keep watch in the barn the following night.

Accordingly, he sat in a chair in the kitchen until the small hours of the morning, and then, going to the barn, he hid himself carefully in the straw.

He waited patiently until the pale light of dawn started to steal faintly through the narrow windows, and then, all of a sudden, he heard a queer rustling sound coming from the far end of the building. Peeping cautiously from his place of concealment, he saw a tiny figure engaged in spreading the corn on the floor in readiness for threshing. Taking up his flail the little elfin creature commenced to work with such a will that in a short space of time a large quantity of corn was threshed. Sweeping the corn into a heap in the centre of the floor, the pixy then made the straw into neat bundles, stacked them against the wall, and mysteriously disappeared.

During breakfast, the farmer told his wife how he had watched the pixy working in the barn just before daybreak. He described the extraordinary scene in great detail, telling her of the skill and speed with which the elf had performed his self-appointed task. He finished his story by observing that the little creature's clothes were so dilapidated that they hung on his diminutive form in rags and tatters.

The kind old couple were so grateful for the help they were receiving from the pixy, that they started to discuss ways in which they might show their appreciation of his services. At length, they decided to present him with a new suit of clothes.

The farmer's wife soon found some brightly coloured pieces of material, and so busily did she ply her needle that by supper time she had the suit of clothes ready.

Again the old man sat in the kitchen until about an

hour before dawn. Then, picking up the suit of clothes, he crossed the yard to the barn, and concealed himself amongst the straw with the same care as on the previous night, but before doing so he placed the clothes on the floor where the pixy would be bound to see them.

As the pale light of approaching daybreak filtered into the barn, the farmer saw the little elf making his way from the other end of the building. No sooner had the pixy observed the gaily coloured garments laid out upon the floor than he snatched them up with a cry of delight, and, casting off his fluttering rags, swiftly arrayed himself in the new clothes. Glancing down at himself with a look of pride on his face, he cried out in a shrill voice, "New toat, new waist-toat, new breeches: you proud, I proud: I shan't work any more!" Then, to the farmer's great surprise, he vanished from sight.

The little elf never came back to the barn again, and for the rest of his days the old man was forced to thresh all his corn himself.

## (5) JAN COO

Some of the finest scenery on Dartmoor is to be found where the East and West Dart rivers mingle their waters at Dartmeet. The united stream rushes turbulently through a deep and narrow valley, its progress marked by many a foaming cascade. On the left side of the river rise the rugged summits of Sharp Tor and Mel Tor, while above the opposite bank the granite rocks of Bench Tor overlook the hollow known as Langamarsh.

On the slope of Sharp Tor, high above the leaping waters of the Dart, stands a solitary farmstead called Rowbrook, to which is attached a strange and tragic legend.

Once upon a time, according to the legend, a boy was employed at the farm to tend cattle. The lad was quiet and well-behaved, and fulfilled all his duties to the satisfaction of his master.

One winter evening, when he had been nearly a year at the farm, the youngster hurried into the kitchen

announcing that he had heard someone calling, and imagined there must be a person in distress.

The farm-workers, who were gathered round the peat fire, thinking some wayfarer had probably lost his way in the valley in the darkness, went out at once to investigate. They soon reached the spot where the boy said he had heard the voice, and all paused to listen. At first the only sound that could be heard was the rushing of the waters of the Dart far below. Then, suddenly, at no great distance, a voice started calling out :—

“ Jan Coo ! Jan Coo ! ”

The men shouted in reply, but there was no answering shout. Lights were procured, and a thorough search made, but no trace of anyone could be found. At length the party returned to the farmstead, greatly mystified by the strange circumstance.

On the following night the lad came running into the kitchen in a state of great excitement with the news that the mysterious voice was again crying out. All the men at once rushed forth into the darkness to the spot indicated by the boy on the previous occasion, and stood there listening intently.

After a short while they heard, out of the stillness of the frosty night, the voice calling clearly and plaintively :—

“ Jan Coo ! Jan Coo ! ”

This time they did not shout in reply, but waited to see what would happen. Presently, the wistful voice called again :—

“ Jan Coo ! Jan Coo ! ”

The men now gave a lusty shout in reply, but there was no answering cry. All was still and silent. After several efforts to obtain a response to their calls had failed, they returned once more to the welcome warmth of the great open hearth in the kitchen of the farmhouse.

Sitting round the cheerful fire they discussed the queer event for some considerable time, and eventually one of the older farm-workers remarked knowingly, “ ’Tis they piskies I reckon. I’ve heered volkes zay thee cas’n tell ’un from a Christian when they be callin’.”



"Ees, you'm right," said another man. "Us had better let 'un bide, and not meddle wi 'un."

Thus, it was decided that no further notice should be taken of the strange voice, should it be heard again.

When darkness fell the following night, and the farm-servants were gathered round the fire as usual, the sound of the weird voice again rang through the narrow valley, but beyond remarking about the fact nobody took any further action in the matter.

The weeks passed by, and night after night the mysterious voice could be heard calling plaintively :—

"Jan Coo! Jan Coo!"

One evening, towards the end of the winter, the boy, with one of the labourers, was climbing up the steep slope from the river to the farmstead at the end of a hard day's work. Twilight was falling fast, and they were looking forward to a well-earned supper.

Suddenly, the voice was heard calling from Langamarsh Pit on the opposite side of the river. The boy instantly shouted in reply, but instead of ceasing as on all the previous occasions when anyone else had shouted in return, the voice called again more insistently than ever :—

"Jan Coo! Jan Coo!"

Once more the youngster shouted, and again came the strange cry, louder than before; but this time it seemed to contain a note of irresistible yearning as it rose above the low murmuring of the Dart.

"I'll go and see what 'tis," exclaimed the boy; and before his companion could stop him the lad turned and ran down the hill towards the river. The many boulders in its rocky bed afforded crossing places at certain points, and it was towards one of these that the boy made his way.

The labourer watched the lad's progress until the gathering darkness hid him from view, and while the man continued on his way to the farmstead he could still hear the voice calling loudly from Langamarsh Pit :—

"Jan Coo! Jan Coo!"

The labourer had almost reached the farmhouse when he noticed that the voice had started to call more quickly.

There was a queer compelling quality in its tone as it cried insistently from the far side of the valley :—

“ Jan Coo ! Jan Coo ! Jan Coo ! ”

When he reached the door of the house the man paused, listening, with his hand on the latch. The mysterious voice had ceased calling. He waited for a short while, but no sound broke the stillness of the night apart from the low murmuring of the river in the valley far below.

Hastening into the kitchen, the farm-worker told the other servants exactly what had happened, and they all wondered whether the boy would have anything interesting to relate when he returned.

Hour after hour passed by, and the lad never appeared. The men went down to the river and called him by name, but they received no reply. In the morning a systematic search for the boy was carried out, but he was never seen again, and it was generally supposed in the district that he had been spirited away by the pixies. This belief was considerably strengthened by the curious fact that from the time of the youngster's disappearance the weird voice was never heard any more.

The identity of the owner of the strange voice will never be known, but the most likely solution to the mystery surrounding the fate of the boy in this queer tale may be found in the words of the following couplet :—

“ River of Dart, Oh, River of Dart !  
Every year thou claim'st a heart.”

## (6) VICKEYTOAD

Once upon a time, there was a worthy yeoman who owned a small farm on the borders of Dartmoor. It was harvest time, and he had just finished cutting a field of corn with his sickle. He was extremely pleased with the excellence of the crop, and before going home to milk his cows, he bound a large quantity of the corn into sheaves, and left them standing in the field in shocks.

When the farmer went into the field the following day he was very surprised, and annoyed, to find that the sheaves

had been dragged to one end of the field and piled into a confused heap.

The good yeoman was much mystified at first, but after considering the matter for a while he came to the conclusion that it must be the work of the pixies, but why they should do such a thing he was at a loss to understand. It could hardly have been done out of mischief because he had always heard that the "little people" only played pranks on those who had caused them displeasure, and as far as he knew he had never done anything to annoy them.

Without wasting any more time pondering on the mystery the farmer worked with a will and stood all the sheaves up into shocks once more.

Later in the day the thought entered his mind that the elves might visit his field again, so he decided to go out at nightfall and keep a watch.

Twilight came stealing softly over the drowsy countryside, and presently the harvest moon rose majestically into the sky flooding the farmyard with a silvery light of such brilliance that every object was clearly discernible. The farmer crossed the yard and soon reached the path leading to the field. All was quiet and peaceful, and with the exception of the occasional bark of a dog not a sound broke the stillness of the night.

Approaching the field with the utmost caution, the worthy yeoman peeped through a hole in the rough moorstone wall, and the sight that met his gaze caused him to gasp with astonishment.

Clearly to be seen in the bright moonlight, a large number of little elves were busily engaged in dragging the sheaves of corn towards one corner of the field. They were all working very hard because it was as much as several of them could do to move one sheaf. While they worked they chattered incessantly to one another, but they were too far away for the farmer to hear what they were saying. Instead of endeavouring to put a stop to the proceedings, the bewildered yeoman was so enthralled by the extraordinary scene that he continued to watch the pixies for some considerable time.

At the corner of the field to which they were taking the sheaves a large group of energetic little goblins were trying to pile them into a heap. What their intentions were the farmer could not imagine, but after a while he realised that unless he intervened he would have a great deal of extra work to do on the following day.

The farmer had just decided to interfere when one of the little elves came quite close to his hiding place, and laying hold of a sheaf of corn, began tugging at it with all his might, while at the same time he kept calling out, "I twit! I twit! I twit!"

The sight of the sheaf of corn being pulled about so roughly right under his very nose annoyed the yeoman so much that he sprang over the wall, and ran towards the pixie crying, "Leave alone my corn, thee mazed little toad!"

At the sudden appearance of the angry farmer all the little elves disappeared over the wall at the other end of the field. The farmer at once gave chase, and as he drew near the wall he heard a mocking laugh, and there, on the gate, sat the pixie he had tried to catch. Pointing to the farmer the pixie turned to two other elves who were also sitting on the gate, and said, "Little doth that old man know my name is Vickeytoad," and as he spoke he and his two companions vanished.

## (7) THE COWS AND THE PIXIES

Long, long ago, there was a farmer who owned a small farm situated in an isolated position on the fringe of Dartmoor. He had three fine fat cows, and he was very proud of the excellent quality of the milk they produced. One of the cows was called Facey, another was named Diamond, and the third was known as Beauty.

Early one morning, when the farmer came downstairs into the kitchen on his way to milk the cows, he noticed, to his astonishment, that the hearth of the great open fireplace was one huge pile of smouldering wood ash. Much puzzled and disturbed by the fact that someone had been using the fireplace during the night, he left the

kitchen, and crossing the yard entered the cowshed. There, to his extreme dismay, he found that Facey was so thin that she looked just like a bag of bones. Her hide hung loose upon her gaunt frame, and her great eyes stared apprehensively as though she had seen a ghost.

The next morning, the farmer's wife offered to do the milking, and when she entered the kitchen she was amazed to see that the fireplace was piled three feet high with hot ash and smoking embers. Filled with a feeling of foreboding she ran quickly to the cowshed, and there she found, to her great grief, that their lovely fat cow Diamond, had become overnight a feeble creature of mere skin and bone like poor Facey. In addition to this dreadful calamity it was later discovered that half a rick of faggot wood had disappeared.

The worried farmer was determined to find out the cause of all his misfortune, so he decided to keep watch the following night. After his wife had retired to bed he hid in a small room which adjoined the kitchen, and leaving the door slightly ajar, in order to be able to see all that might happen in the larger room, he settled down to his nocturnal vigil.

The big stone-floored kitchen was still dimly lit by the faint glow of the dying fire, and the slow monotonous ticking of the grandfather clock in the corner of the room made the weary yeoman feel very drowsy, so he was forced to bite one of his fingers, from time to time, in order to keep himself awake. Two hours passed by uneventfully, and he began to think that he was wasting his time, and would be better in bed, when suddenly the door leading from the kitchen into the yard flew open and in rushed several hundred little pixies. They were laughing and dancing with joyous abandon and dragging something on the end of a rope.

The farmer was so petrified with fright upon seeing the pixies that he could scarcely breathe, and then, to his horror, he saw his last remaining healthy cow, Beauty, being dragged into the middle of the kitchen on the end of a halter.

While some of the elves brought in faggots of wood

and quickly had a roaring fire blazing on the great hearth, others threw the unfortunate cow down on the floor, killed her, flayed the body, and then roasted the carcass on a huge spit.

"Take care," cried one of the pixies, who seemed to be their king, "let no bone be broken."

As soon as the pixies had finished their feast, and there was nothing more left to eat, they began to play with the bones by tossing them to and fro to one another. One little leg bone fell close to the partly open door behind which the terrified farmer was concealed, and being greatly afraid lest the elves should retrieve the bone and discover his hiding-place, he cautiously put out his hand and drew the bone into the closet. No sooner had he done so than the king of the pixies leapt on to the kitchen table and shouted in a shrill voice, "Gather all the bones together!"

At their king's command, the pixies ran in all directions gathering up the bones. "Arrange them in their proper places," ordered the little monarch, and in a very short space of time all the bones were in their correct positions inside the neatly folded skin. Striking the skin lightly with a little wand, the elfin king murmured a few mystic words, and to the trembling farmer's utter astonishment Beauty was alive once more.

Having finished their frolic, the pixies led Beauty back to the cowshed. The poor animal was lowing dismally, and as she went across the yard she limped heavily for lack of the small bone the terrified farmer still held in his hand.

A faint light commenced to spread across the eastern sky heralding the approach of another day. A cock crowed loudly at the far end of the farmyard, the pixies suddenly vanished, and, still shaking with fright after his fantastic experience, the farmer crept slowly upstairs to his bed.

This strange tale is very similar in some respects to a story connected with the god Thor in Scandinavian

mythology, only in the latter case, instead of cows, the victims are two goats.

\* \* \* \*

A version of the foregoing pixie legend is to be found in "Notes & Queries" (3rd Series), Vol. 8 (1865), p. 282. It was one of several stories collected by the Rev. S. Baring-Gould, who was born in Exeter on 28th January, 1834, and died on 2nd January 1924 at Lew Trenchard near Tavistock.



## PART II.

### GIANTS AND EARTH-GNOMES

#### THE ENCHANTMENT OF TAMARA

Many thousands of years ago, in a dark underground cavern situated in the heart of Dartmoor, there lived a nymph of great charm and loveliness named Tamara. Her parents, who were gnomes, were spirits of the earth, and, strange though it may seem, they were as ugly as their daughter was beautiful.

The gnomes disliked the light of day intensely, and only issued forth from their home in the bowels of the earth when night enshrouded the wide expanse of moorland above their dwelling-place with a cloak of darkness.

Tamara, however, hated the gloomy cavern in which she was born, and was always wanting to visit the world of light in the upper regions above her home. She loved sunshine, blue sky and little fluffy white clouds. When the shadows of the clouds chased one another across the broad shoulders of the high tors, she would clap her hands and shout with joy. In the spring she would wander happily through the woods which clothed the sides of the deep coombes on the outskirts of the moor, and listen to the birds singing in the trees. The joyful clamour of the tumbling waters of the little moorland streams sounded like music to her ears, and she yearned to be able to live on the surface of the earth where everything seemed to be so bright and beautiful.

The gnomes often scolded their daughter for visiting the upper world. They told her about the dreaded giants who lived on the moor, and gave her warning that great evil might befall her if she were to be captured by any of these dangerous monsters. All their efforts to protect their lovely young child from harm were of no avail. Tamara was headstrong and wayward, and, paying no



heed to their advice, she continued to roam over the surface of the earth whenever the sun was shining, and the sky was blue.

For a long time, from secret hiding-places among the rocky tors, two young Dartmoor giants named Tavy and Torridge, had watched the fair maiden as she danced in the glorious rays of the sun, or wandered, carefree, by some moorland stream.

Eventually, Tamara became aware of the presence of the two giants, and being extremely fleet of foot she often led them over the wildest parts of the moor in playful chase.

One day, both Tavy and Torridge came upon the elusive nymph resting beneath a bush on the high hills about four miles east of the place where now stands the little village of Morwenstow. The two giants decided that the time had come for the maiden to choose one of them as her husband, and bowing low before her they used many terms of endearment in an effort to persuade her to make a choice between them.

Tamara had been away from her home for a much longer period than usual, and her parents becoming greatly concerned for her safety set out in search of her. At length, to their extreme anger, they found her in the company of the two young giants who had always been their bitter enemies.

By casting a magic spell Tamara's father caused the two giants to fall into a deep slumber, and then he endeavoured to persuade his wilful daughter to return to their secure habitation in the depths of the earth.

Tamara, who had no desire to go back to the damp and murky cavern in which she had lived for so long, refused to leave her lovers. His child's disobedience caused the ill-tempered gnome to fly into a terrible rage, and he cursed her for her unworthiness. Then, by means of a powerful enchantment, he changed her into a river which would flow for ever into the southern sea.

The lovely nymph dissolved into a cascade of tears, and in the form of a stream of crystal-clear water of exceeding beauty she glided towards the ocean.

When Tavy awoke from his long sleep and found that Tamara had disappeared, he ran as fast as he could to his father, who lived in the wildest part of Dartmoor, and asked him to help him in his trouble.

Although the old giant was a great enchanter, he was not so powerful in that respect as the gnome, so he was unable to remove the spell that bound Tamara. Therefore, in order to ease his son's anguish, he changed him into a moorland stream.

No sooner had the spell been cast than the impatient young giant commenced to rush towards the southern sea. Flowing swiftly and turbulently over rocks and boulders, falling in numerous cascades through deep ravines, the high-spirited Tavy eventually reached his beloved Tamara, and from that joyous moment, with their waters intermingled and whispering softly to each other, they have continued to flow together into the broad ocean right up to the present day.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate Torridge, who had slept for a much longer period than Tavy, suddenly awoke from his spell-bound slumber, and quickly divining what had taken place, he hurried to an ancient wizard who lived in a very desolate part of the moor near Hangingstone Hill. Imploring the old man's aid, he asked to be transformed into a river as quickly as possible. The wizard obligingly complied with his request, but in his haste to be off Torridge took the wrong direction, and deeply sorrowing, he flows sadly away from Tamara for evermore.

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An early version of the above fairy-tale appears in the book, "Popular Romances of the West of England," by Robert Hunt, F.R.S. The story was acquired by Mr. Hunt at some time between the years 1829 and 1862.

## THE ENCHANTED MIST

Amid the high hills of the western borders of Dartmoor, and not more than four and a half miles from Tavistock, Vixen Tor overlooks the valley of the River Walkham at a point about half a mile below Merrivale Bridge.

Although the portion of the spur on which the tor is situated is less than 1,000 feet above sea level, the actual tor itself is the highest rock mass on Dartmoor. On the northern side, it rises 52 feet above the hill on which it stands, and on the southern side, where the ground is 40 feet lower, it towers to a height of 93 feet.\*

This lofty crag is closely connected with the following rather unique fairy-tale about an enchanted mist.

Once upon a time, a hideous and very wicked witch, named Vixana, lived in a secret underground cavern in the heart of the hill beneath Vixen Tor. The cavern had been constructed at her command by the earth-gnomes of the moor, in order that she should have a secure place in which to weave her magic spells.

The witch was incredibly old, and very wise in all the mysterious arts of necromancy. Her wizened face was deeply furrowed by many wrinkles, and there was not a single hair on her head. She possessed only two teeth, which were in her upper jaw, and they were long, and sharply pointed like the canine teeth of a savage wolf.

The people of the neighbourhood lived in constant terror of the evil old creature, and were very careful not to go near the place where she lived in case something dreadful might happen to them.

In the far off days, when the events depicted in this story took place, there existed below Vixen Tor an extremely treacherous area of bogland. Now, of the many cruel pastimes in which Vixana frequently indulged, none delighted her more than to lure some unfortunate wayfarer into the quaking bog at the foot of the tor.

At dawn each day it was her custom to issue forth from her underground retreat, and climb to the top of Vixen Tor. There she would crouch, muttering evilly to herself, as she scanned the valley below for any signs of an approaching traveller. As soon as one appeared in the distance she would wait until the unfortunate person had reached a certain point on the path fairly close to the edge of the

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\* "Dartmoor," by R. Hansford Worth, p. 34.

marshy area, and then raising a skinny arm she would wave her wand, and weave a powerful spell.

No sooner was the spell cast than a thick clinging mist would rise out of the centre of the bog, and drift slowly over the ground until it had completely encompassed the ill-fated traveller.

Weaving and eddying in dreadful menace, the enchanted mist would draw the terrified victim relentlessly to his doom in the choking depths of the treacherous bog.

As soon as the poor wayfarer, with one last despairing cry, was engulfed in the quaking morass, the fiendish old witch would start howling like a wolf, and then, as she once more raised her wand, the magic mist would return from whence it came, and there would be no sign on the quiet surface of the bog of the tragedy which had so recently occurred.

Now it happened that in a remote part of Dartmoor there lived a moorman, who, at one time, was able to do the pixies a great service. The grateful little fairies rewarded the kind old man by giving him two gifts. The first was the power of clear sight, so that he would always be able to see quite plainly through the densest mist, and the second was a ring of pure gold which, if placed on his finger when danger threatened, would make him invisible to human eyes.

One day, a traveller told the moorman of the terrible wickedness of the witch, Vixana, and how she was terrorising the countryside on the western borders of Dartmoor. So the moorman decided that he would make an attempt to bring about her destruction. Placing the magic ring in his pocket, he set forth on his long journey to the western part of the moor.

The valley of the River Walkham was far more wild and desolate in those dim and distant times than it is today, and the hardy old moorman began to feel very weary as he trudged steadily along the rough track towards Vixen Tor.

Meanwhile, the witch was in her accustomed place, perched on the very top of the crag. She was in an

extremely bad temper because not one wayfarer had passed along the track in the valley for many weeks, and her cruel eyes glittered with frustrated hate as she impatiently scanned the countryside below for some sign of a human being.

Suddenly, she saw the moorman toiling slowly along the path. Her lips twisted into a fiendish grin, revealing her long fangs, and she gloated over her approaching victim like some sombre bird of prey.

As the moorman was about to pass by the fringe of the morass, the witch waved her wand, and the enchanted mist issued from the bog completely surrounding him with a thick clinging blanket of darkness.

The moorman was not in the least bit daunted by the murky menace because, owing to the power of clear sight, he was able to see through the mist with the utmost ease, and carefully avoiding the dangerous morass, he made his way towards Vixen Tor without delay.

When Vixana saw the man emerge safely from the magic mist she screamed with rage, and at once commenced weaving a further spell in order to destroy him.

The moorman, realising that he was in deadly peril, drew the fairy ring from his pocket, and slipped it on his finger. No sooner had he done so than he instantly became invisible.

His sudden disappearance mystified the witch profoundly, and while she was looking about in a vain endeavour to discover his whereabouts, the moorman quietly climbed up the northern side of the tor.

When he reached the top of the crag the witch was peering over the southern edge, and, creeping stealthily towards her, he gave her a violent push, and uttering a scream of terror the hideous old creature fell to her death at the foot of the tor 93 feet below.

There was great rejoicing throughout the western borderland of Dartmoor when it was heard that the terrible witch, Vixana, was dead, and the brave old moorman received so many rewards for the service he had rendered

to the people of the neighbourhood, that he was able to live in comfort for the rest of his life.

## THE VENGEANCE OF THE EARTH-GNOMES

The water supply of the attractive seaside resort of Torquay in South Devon was assured for many years to come when the Fernworthy Reservoir, on Dartmoor, was completed and opened on 22nd June, 1942. The reservoir was formed by the construction of a dam across the upper part of the valley of the South Teign River. Work on the project was commenced on 14th August, 1936, and during the course of the work the ancient farmstead of Fernworthy was demolished. The house was last occupied in 1928, and its former site, on the north-west bank of the reservoir, is commemorated by a very strange little fairy-legend.

Fernworthy was built in 1590, by the last male member of an ancient yeoman family, on the site of a much older house which had been the home of his franklin ancestors for many generations. The house was solidly built of granite blocks quarried from the moor, a stark and gloomy structure, well in keeping with its remote and desolate setting.

The granite used in the building was obtained from outcrops of rock, of a particularly durable quality, on a hillside at some distance from the farm, and unbeknown to the yeoman, these particular rocks were under the protection of certain mysterious members of the fairy race.

Deep within the heart of the hill there lived a number of earth-gnomes who strongly resented the presence of human beings on their domain. When the workmen employed by the farmer commenced to quarry stone for the new house, the gnomes were so enraged that they vowed vengeance upon the rash mortal who had dared to violate the fairy hill.

Soon after the completion of the new farmhouse an event occurred for which the yeoman and his wife had

long been hoping in vain. This important happening was the birth of a son. The farmer's ardent desire to have an heir to inherit the home of his ancestors seemed, at long last, to have been fulfilled.

Unfortunately, for the yeoman and his wife, other creatures had also been eagerly awaiting the birth of the heir of Fernworthy. These vindictive little people, were the elusive earth-gnomes of the enchanted hill, who were now ready to have their revenge on the yeoman for taking stone from the rocks belonging to the fairy-folk.

One winter evening as twilight was falling, and the farmer had not yet returned from cutting turf on the moor, his wife was sitting by the great open fireplace in the farmhouse kitchen watching over the child in the cradle. She had left the door of the room slightly ajar in order to be able to hear her husband enter the yard on his return from work. The pleasant warmth of the turf-fire made her feel drowsy, and after a short while she dropped off to sleep.

The opportunity for which the ugly little gnomes had been patiently waiting had arrived, and they acted swiftly. The mother awoke from her brief slumber just in time to see the flutter of a grey cloak as something darted through the half-open doorway. A weird laugh of triumph sounded from outside, and when she looked in the cradle she found to her dismay and anguish that her beloved child had gone. The cruel vengeance of the heartless earth-gnomes was complete.

The people of the neighbourhood were firmly convinced that as the new house at Fernworthy had been built of stone taken from an enchanted hill the first human being to be born in the building had thus fallen into the power of the fairy-folk.

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A brief version of the foregoing fairy-legend is given by John L. W. Page in his book "The Rivers of Devon," published in 1893.

## CHAPTER V

# LEGENDS OF SOUTH DEVON

## THE BRUTUS MYTH

A VERY venerable relic of the dim and distant past, known as the Brutus Stone, is preserved in the ancient borough of Totnes in South Devon.

The stone is situated close to the East Gate in the pavement outside No. 51 Fore Street. It is of granite and measures about 2 feet 4 inches in length, and 18 inches in width, and is shaped rather like a kidney bean. At one time it protruded from the ground to a height of 18 inches, but it was levelled when the street was altered about the year 1810 (Trans. Devon. Assoc., Vol. 52, p. 49).

It is of very great antiquity and is traditionally supposed to mark the spot where Brutus the Trojan first set foot on these shores.

John Prince, who was Vicar of Totnes from 1676 to 1681, mentions the stone in his book "Worthies of Devon," which was published in 1701.

Attached to this stone is an extremely old legend of a mythical type, which dates back through the ages to an obscure period in the very early history of the land which we now call England.

According to the legend, Brutus, grandson of Aeneas, King of Troy, went out hunting one day in a great forest, and it so happened that during the course of the hunting expedition he accidentally killed his father, Sylvius, with an arrow. For this deed he was expelled from Italy.

After his banishment he sailed to Greece, where he took command of the scattered Trojan warriors, and led them against King Pandrasus. The Trojans gained



a great victory, and imposed hard terms upon the defeated Grecian king. Pandrasus was compelled to allow Brutus to marry his daughter, Ignoge, and also to provide him with a large fleet of ships and provisions, so that he could sail away and seek his fortune in other lands.

Before he departed from Greece, Brutus consulted an oracle of Diana, and was told that the gods would lead him to an island set in a western sea, beyond a country called Gaul, where he would establish a new nation.

“ ‘ Brutus ! there lies beyond the Gallic bounds  
An island which the western sea surrounds,  
By giants once possessed ; now few remain  
To bar thy entrance, or obstruct thy reign.  
To reach that happy shore thy sails employ ;  
There fate decrees to raise a second Troy,  
And found an empire in thy royal line,  
Which time shall ne’er destroy, nor bounds confine.’ ”

*(Geoffrey of Monmouth (Giles's tr.)*

Voyaging amidst great perils along the shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea, they discovered four settlements composed of people of Trojan descent who were under the rule of a very valiant warrior named Corineus.

Uniting their forces, Brutus and Corineus sailed westwards, and passing between the Pillars of Hercules, now known as the Straits of Gibraltar, they followed the coast of Spain until they reached the Bay of Biscay. Entering the River Loire, they disembarked from their ships, defeated the Gauls in a great battle, and then proceeded to ravage the country of Aquitaine with fire and sword.

Eventually they decided to leave the territory of the King of Aquitaine, and continue their search for the mysterious island which the gods had promised them.

Collecting together the immense amount of plunder they had acquired during their campaign in Gaul, they returned to their ships and sailed down the River Loire to the sea.

Steering their vessels along the coast of Gaul in a northerly direction, they eventually came to the port of Totnes which was situated in the southern part of an island called Albion.

Although the island was wonderfully beautiful, and covered with vast forests teeming with wild life of every description, it was inhabited by a tribe of fierce giants who lived in dark underground caverns.

Brutus and his warriors disembarked from their ships, and having discovered by divination that they had at last arrived at the island promised to them by the gods, their hearts were filled with happiness, and they rejoiced at their good fortune.

One day when they were all gathered together in order to discuss the best method of taking possession of the island, they were suddenly attacked by a large number of ferocious giants who hurled huge rocks at them, killing several members of their company.

Undismayed by the savage attack made upon them by the uncouth inhabitants of the island, the Trojans fought back with great courage, and by skilful archery slew several of the giants with their arrows so that the remainder turned and fled.

Brutus and his warriors, greatly elated by their success, pursued the fugitives, and killed all of them with their swords and lances. They then returned to their camp full of rejoicing, and gave thanks to their gods for the great victory they had gained over the horrible giants.

The news of the victory achieved by the Trojans over the local inhabitants soon reached the ears of the King of the Giants, a terrible monster who was taller and stronger than all the others, named Goemagot.

Gathering together all his tribe, Goemagot made preparations to attack the Trojans in their camp. Brutus, however, becoming aware of his intentions, led his warriors in a violent onslaught upon the giants, slaying all of them with the exception of their mighty king, who was twelve cubits in height.

Corineus, one of the greatest of the Trojan warriors, challenged Goemagot to a wrestling match. The King of the Giants accepted the challenge, and a titanic struggle ensued. After a time, Goemagot managed to get both his arms about the Trojan's body, and exerting the whole

of his enormous strength, broke three of his opponent's ribs.

Infuriated with pain, Corineus raised Goemagot above his head, and carrying him to a high cliff overlooking the sea, he hurled him down on to the rocks below with such force that the giant was dashed to pieces.

So much blood poured from the giant's body that the sea at the foot of the cliff was reddened to the depth of a fathom, and the place was called forever afterwards Goemagot's Leap.

After this epic contest, the two Trojan leaders explored the country thoroughly, and decided to share it between them. Brutus gave Corineus first choice, and the giant-killer hearing that there were more giants to be found in the westerly portion chose that part of the country and called it Corineum, after his own name. To this day the extreme south-westerly region of the island is known as Cornwall.

Brutus took the rest of the country, and, following his friend's example, called it Britain after his own name, and thus the inhabitants of the land came to be known as Britons.

There is a tradition that the final scene in the celebrated contest between Corineus, the Trojan champion, and the giant Goemagot took place near the spot now known as Plymouth Hoe.

For hundreds of years two huge figures, cut deeply in the turf, commemorated the great fight, but when the Citadel was built in 1671 they were destroyed.\*

The earliest documentary reference to these figures occurs in the Receiver's Accounts of the borough of Plymouth under the date 1494—5:—

"It. paid to Cotewyll for ye renewyng of ye pyctur of Gogmagog a pon ye howe. VIIId."

In all probability the Brutus Myth is based on a folk-memory of an invasion of the southern shores of our island by a migratory race from the Continent of Europe, and occurred long before the dawn of written history. It

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\* Trans. Devon. Assoc., Vol. 12, p. 566.

is almost certainly pre-Celtic in origin, and probably records the coming of people of Iberian stock to this country more than three thousand five hundred years ago. Therefore it must be one of the oldest legends connected with the British Isles.

The Iberians were a race of small dark-haired folk of the Bronze Age period, and to them the primitive and uncouth inhabitants of the country, who were much bigger people, may have appeared as giants.

The details for the above version of the Brutus Myth have been taken from the chronicle of Geoffrey of Monmouth who wrote early in the twelfth century. The legend is also mentioned very briefly in some of the ancient Welsh Chronicles.

## THE PERILOUS WAGER

Hacombe House, a nondescript late Georgian mansion of red sandstone, is situated about three miles south-east of Newton Abbot.

At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, the manor of Hacombe was held by Stephen de Hacombe under the renowned Baldwin de Brioniis, Sheriff of Devon. About the year 1400 the estate came into the possession of the Courtenay family, and shortly after the death of Sir Hugh Courtenay, in 1425, it passed to the ancient family of Carew through the marriage of Sir Hugh's younger daughter and heiress, Joan, to Sir Nicholas Carew who died in 1469. The Carew family have continued to hold the manor of Hacombe right up to the present day.

In the extensive grounds surrounding Hacombe House stands the little church of St. Blaise, which was consecrated by Bishop Grandisson of Exeter in the year 1328. Fastened to the door in the south porch of the building are two ancient horse-shoes which are closely connected with a very interesting local tradition.

The following brief reference to the tradition has been

taken from the book "Worthies of Devon," which was published in 1701:—

"Here may be seen two of the four shoes of a horse; which a gentleman of this family swam a prodigious way into the Sea, and back again, upon a Wager of a Manour of land, and won it; for which the horse was deservedly manumitted from all future Services ever after, and his Shooes fastned to the Church door; where some of them remain in perpetuam rei memoriam."

It appears that four horseshoes were originally nailed to the door radially, but two of them and part of the third have disappeared. The one remaining intact is six inches in length and four and a half inches in width, and it possesses eight nail holes.

An early version of the tradition relates that, at some period during the sixteenth century, a dispute arose between the Carews of Hacombe and the Champernownes of Dartington about the ownership of a certain valuable manor.

Each of the two great landowners claimed that the manor was his own property, and after there had been much argument about the matter for a considerable time, both men decided to settle the dispute by the outcome of a very unusual and extremely hazardous wager.

It was mutually agreed that each man should mount the best steed in his stable, and then they would ride together to Tor Bay, and the one who was able to swim his horse farthest out to sea would become the owner of the manor in question.

In due course the two men set forth together to commence their epic contest. For a long time they breasted the waves side by side, but at length Carew began to gain the lead, and after a while he drew far ahead of his rival.

Suddenly he heard a frantic shout for help, and looking back he beheld Champernowne struggling in the water—his horse having expired under him.

Carew at once went to his rival's aid, and having rescued him, turned his horses's head towards the far-distant shore.

The return journey was desperately perilous. The gallant horse was greatly exhausted, and it now had to carry a double burden, but in spite of this, with the most remarkable strength and courage, it fought its way through the waves, and at last managed to reach the shore safely.

Carew was filled with admiration of the wonderful feat performed by his horse, and he announced that, as a reward for winning him the manor, the brave animal should do no more work for the rest of its life.

From then onwards the horse lived in the greatest ease and comfort until it eventually died of old age. Its shoes, which had been removed when the horse was put to grass, were fixed to the door of Haccombe Church in memory of the high courage and endurance of a very valiant steed.

It is well-known that the majority of legends and traditions have a background of historical fact, therefore, in spite of the suggestion put forward by some writers that the horseshoes were nailed to the door of Haccombe Church as a protection against the evil power of witchcraft, the foregoing tradition may well contain a considerable amount of truth.

## RESURRECTION BOB

From a brief glance at the map it will be seen that the southern coastline of Devon, from the mouth of the River Exe to Plymouth, is broken by the indentations of numerous inlets, coves and river estuaries. It is at once apparent that such a coastline would have provided many excellent spots for the landing of contraband in the old smuggling days.

Between Dawlish and Brixham there are several secluded coves and beaches which would have been very suitable places for the unloading of cargoes of smuggled goods by resolute seamen, and, without a doubt, the smugglers made good use of them.

There is a cave in the limestone cliffs of Berry Head, near Brixham, that is said to have been used for the storing

of contraband by a daring gang of smugglers led by the celebrated Bob Elliott. A most amusing story has been handed down about this particular band of smugglers.

One day when the leader was laid up with a bad attack of gout, the crew of his lugger arrived with a number of kegs of brandy for which they had not been able to find room in the already well-stocked cavern.

After consulting together, the smugglers decided that the kegs should remain hidden for the time being in Bob's cottage.

In the meantime, the suspicions of the authorities had been aroused, and Preventive men called at the cottage. They were told, however, that poor old Bob had died during the night, so out of respect for the bereaved family the excisemen withdrew without making any search of the house.

The next day an extremely large coffin arrived at the door of the cottage, and when a bystander made a remark about its unusual size he was told that Bob Elliott was an unusually large man.

During the night three coastguards met a party of men carrying a coffin along the road leading from Brixham to Totnes. Just as they were about to question the men they saw what appeared to be the ghost of the dead smuggler at the rear of the procession. Overcome with superstitious terror the coastguards fled in panic.

The next morning the coastguards reported the incident to their highly experienced commander, whose suspicions were thoroughly aroused by the story of the ghostly escort.

The following night the officer paid a personal visit to Bob Elliott's cottage, and as he stood listening by a window he heard the wily Bob telling a party of friends about the clever way in which he had completely outwitted the excisemen.

While the company assembled in the cottage were still roaring with laughter at the cunning way in which the authorities had been hoodwinked, the officer suddenly entered the house and told them that he had heard the

whole story. The resourceful old smuggler's confusion and dismay may well be imagined, but beyond giving him a sound reprimand the officer let him off scot free. Perhaps he was unwilling to admit publicly how easily the King's men had been outwitted.

Because of this humorous episode, the leader of the Brixham smugglers was known as "Resurrection Bob" for the rest of his life.\*

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\*"The Coasts of Devon and Lundy Island," p. 356.



## CHAPTER VI

# LEGENDS OF EAST DEVON

## THE GATES OF EXETER

**D**URING the reign of King Edward the Confessor, there lived in Devon a giant named Ordulph. It is recorded that he was a man of gigantic stature and prodigious strength.

According to ancient tradition, when he stood with his feet astride the distance spanned was no less than ten feet. Even if his legs were exceptionally long in proportion to his body, this would make him well over nine feet in height.

The majority of legends connected with giants are considered to be race-memories of the mythical and uncouth gods of long forgotten religious cults, but Ordulph was a giant who really existed.

Several stories have been handed down through the past nine hundred years, describing this enormous man's remarkable strength and size. According to one of the legends, King Edward the Confessor decided to pay a visit to the city of Exeter. He set out accompanied by a large cavalcade of nobles and thanes, among whom was one of his kinsmen named Ordulph.

As it was a very beautiful day, the King rode at a leisurely pace in order to admire the lovely countryside through which he had to pass.

Devon was a much wilder land in the eleventh century than it is today. Great forests clothed the steep slopes of the deep coombes among the hills, and in the valleys extensive marshland flanked the winding streams.

As the king and his companions proceeded on their

way startled deer bounded lightly across their path, and in the woodland glades red squirrels peered down at them from overhanging branches of the great trees towering high above their heads.

Occasionally they passed through clearings in the forests in which were situated tiny secluded hamlets, or perhaps the strongly stockaded homestead of some local thane.

At times the track they were following took them over the windswept tops of high hills where vast expanses of rough heathland were dotted here and there with the burial mounds of chieftains of a bygone age.

Owing to the cavalcade's slow progress, the royal party did not arrive at the western capital at the appointed time, and the inhabitants, thinking that the visit would not take place until the following day, closed the gate through which the king was to ride.

The lovely summer's day was far spent when the king and his companions arrived within sight of the city walls, and twilight was falling fast. As they approached nearer they noticed with astonishment that the ponderous city gates were barred against them.

At Edward's bidding one of the thanes rapped heavily on the solid oak of the postern with the hilt of his sword, calling out loudly as he did so, "Open in the name of the King of England!"

There was no reply, and the great gates remained shut for the very good reason that the guard who should have been on duty was in the nearest tavern quaffing a large stoup of ale.

The king became most annoyed at being shut out from his goodly city of Exeter, and, turning to his escort, he exclaimed indignantly, "How long have I got to wait outside my own city before someone will open the gates?"

As Edward spoke, the gigantic Ordulf dismounted from his powerful war-horse, and, bowing to the king, asked if he might be allowed to open the gates.

The king laughed as he gave the requested permission, and replied, "Anyone who can open those gates by force must have the Devil's own strength."

Throwing the reins of his horse to a servant, Ordulph strode to the gates, and seizing the outer bolts with both hands he broke them in pieces with apparent ease, tearing down part of the city wall as he did so. Warming to his work, and grinding his teeth in his determination to gain entrance to the city, he gave a second proof of his enormous strength. Loosening the great iron-studded oaken gates by giving them a couple of violent kicks, he seized hold of them, and wrenched them open so fiercely that both the huge door posts were shattered to pieces.

This remarkable feat was loudly cheered by the king's companions, but Edward himself merely remarked, "Ordulph, of a truth, you have the Devil's own strength."

In spite of his massive build and muscular power, Ordulph died in the prime of life at some period soon after the Conquest, and was buried at Tavistock in the precincts of the great abbey which was founded in 973 by an ancestor who also bore the name, Ordulph.

It is said that when he lay dying, Ordulph bequeathed a large sum of money to the church at Horton in Dorset, and gave instructions that his body was to be buried there. However, the unscrupulous Sihtric, Abbot of Tavistock, seized both body and legacy, and carried them off by force to his own monastery in Devon.\*

## THE LOST HEIR OF POLTIMORE

About four miles from Exeter, in a north-easterly direction, stands Poltimore House, once the residence of the Bampfylde family, and now a private hospital. The building is a large plain late Georgian mansion containing vestiges of an earlier structure dating from the second half of the seventeenth century.

The manor of Poltimore came into the possession of the Bampfyldes soon after the year 1303, and it has remained their property right up to the present day. Attached to this ancient estate there is a legend which reads just

\* William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum*, ed. Hamilton (Rolls Series), p. 203.

like a story taken from a children's book of romantic fairy-tales.

At some period during the Middle Ages, so the tradition goes, the little heir of Poltimore, when he was only a few years old, became an orphan owing to the sudden deaths of both his parents. Now in mediaeval times a minor of high rank whose parents were dead would be given by the King into the wardship of some great noble, and the revenue from the child's estates went into the guardian's pocket until such time as the child should come of age, so, naturally, wardships were greatly sought after. In the majority of cases the minors were well cared for by their guardians, and educated in a manner befitting their high birth, but occasionally a ruthless baron would seriously misuse his position of wardship.

Unfortunately for the infant heir of Poltimore, the King placed him in the guardianship of a powerful, and particularly unscrupulous baron who lived in one of the eastern counties of England.

The baron was not only ruthless and grasping, but he was also exceedingly crafty, and he made up his mind that he would enjoy the revenue from the Bampfylde estates for the rest of his life, so in order to achieve his wicked ambition he hatched a very cunning plot whereby he would cause his little ward to vanish without actually doing the child any physical harm.

To make certain that none of his ward's retainers would know anything about his evil intentions, the baron sent some of his most trusted servants into the county of Devon, with strict orders to bring the child to his castle without delay, and on no account to let anyone else accompany them on the journey.

Owing to the great distance they had to travel, the servants were mounted on the best horses the castle stables could provide, and they were well armed in case they might meet with outlaws on the way.

No sooner had the Bampfylde heir been brought into his presence than the baron called for his horse to be saddled, and then taking the child up in front of him he rode alone

from the castle into the adjoining forest. At length he came to a forester's cottage set in a secluded glade in a remote part of the woods, and handing the youngster to the forester's wife he told her that the child was a foundling, and ordered her to bring him up with her own children.

Many years passed by, and the little boy who had arrived in the forest as a foundling, when he was no more than three or four years of age, had grown into a handsome and stalwart youth; and so great was his knowledge of woodcraft that the baron made him his huntsman.

Whenever any of young Bampfylde's relatives made enquiries as to his whereabouts the deceitful baron would set their minds at rest by vaguely informing them that the lad was travelling in a foreign country, or that he had sent him to France in order to improve his education.

However, in spite of the baron's cleverness, there was one old and faithful retainer on the Poltimore estate who had grave suspicions that all was not well.

One day, although the roads at that period were fraught with many perils, the old man set forth alone on the long journey to the baron's castle, and after enduring many hardships he at length reached his destination where he was soon able to find employment as a woodcutter.

By careful observation and discreet enquiry, the faithful retainer managed to identify the baron's youthful huntsman as the heir of the Bampfyldes of Poltimore.

Eventually, he was able to grasp an opportunity of speaking to the lad when nobody else was present.

Having told him the true facts about his birth and high position, and how falsely he had been treated by the baron, he skilfully arranged his escape, and after many adventures they at last reached Devon safely.

Thus, through the courage, determination and loyalty of an old man the lost heir of Poltimore regained his estates.

The earliest version of this remarkably interesting legend is to be found in the book "Worthies of Devon," by John Prince, which was published in 1701.

## THE GHOST OF MARLPIT'S HILL

On a fine sunny afternoon in the year 1904 a party of small children, led by a schoolmistress, were going for a walk up Marlpit's Hill to the south of the little market town of Honiton. They had just passed the bend in the road by the beautiful fifteenth century church of St. Michael, and were nearing the little thatched cottage which used to stand on a narrow strip of ground on the right-hand side of the road, when suddenly the children noticed a strange-looking man coming down the hill towards them.

The man was exceptionally tall, and very wild of aspect. He was wearing a black broad-brimmed hat, and a long brown coat, and he was staring straight in front of him in rather a dazed kind of way. His queer old-fashioned clothes were tattered and torn, and much bespattered with mud.

As he passed by, the children stared at him with their eyes filled with apprehension. The schoolmistress, noticing the children's frightened glances, said in a surprised voice, "What on earth are you all looking at?"

One of the children whispered nervously, "We are looking at that funny man."

"What silly nonsense," said the mistress, "I can't see any funny man. There is nobody on the road but ourselves."

The children were so insistent about the fact that they had seen the man, and were able to describe his dress and wild appearance so clearly, that the schoolmistress mentioned the peculiar incident to Miss Barnett, the headmistress, when she returned to the school on Church Hill after the walk.

On further enquiries being made, it was discovered that a man who was living in the cottage in 1685 took part in Monmouth's Rebellion, and fought at the battle of Sedgmoor. When the ill-fated Duke's army was defeated, the man managed to escape from the dreadful scene of carnage that followed, and by hiding during the day in muddy ditches, and travelling furtively by night, he eventually

succeeded in reaching his cottage on the slope of Marlpit's Hill.

Just as his wife and children were running from the cottage to greet the exhausted fugitive, a party of troopers from the royal army galloped up and cut him to pieces with their heavy cavalry swords in full view of his horror-stricken wife and family.

An extremely interesting feature of this ghost story is the fact that all the children saw the apparition, but not the schoolmistress. This bears out the oft-repeated assertion that children are able to see ghostly materializations which are invisible to adult eyes.

A man living not far from the village of Offwell, near Honiton, told the author of this book in November 1955, that his father saw the ghost in 1907. He was walking up Marlpit's Hill one night when the full moon was riding high in the sky. It was almost as light as day, and suddenly the apparition appeared in the road ahead of him. He was terribly frightened, but before the thing vanished he noticed that it was very tall, and wore a black wide-brimmed hat.

The last person to live in the cottage on Marlpit's Hill was an old widow named Mrs. Elizabeth Dare Gaydon, who died on 8th February, 1928 at the age of 79.

After Mrs. Gaydon's death, the cottage remained unoccupied for several years, and when it fell into a ruinous condition it was pulled down and the stones used for repair work to buildings on the Combe estate. It is still possible, however, to trace the foundations of the little building on the grassy verge by the roadside.

## HALSBEARE POOL

The lovely green valleys and narrow wooded coombes which cleave deeply into the Blackdown Hills in East Devon have a sylvan charm of their own which it would be difficult to surpass.

In days gone by many a hard-pressed smuggler successfully evaded his pursuers by making skilful use of the

network of sunken lanes, and old pack-horse tracks, which wind mysteriously through these beautiful coombes, past secluded farmsteads and over the windswept expanses of the high places.

The Blackdown Hills terminate in the west, with Ponchydown rising to a height of 897 feet above sea level. Down the side of this great rampart of high ground straggles the forlorn-looking little village of Blackborough. In a sheltered position among the foothills below Ponchydown and about a mile from the village, is Halsbeare Farm. An interesting smuggling legend is connected with a small pond which lies close by the farmhouse.

About the year 1785, a party of smugglers, closely pursued by Revenue Officers, came along the lane by the farm. Fearing capture, the smugglers sank a large number of brandy kegs in the pool, and made good their escape by a footpath over the fields to Ballyman's Farm. Here the fugitives were soon hidden in the maze of sunken lanes situated at this spot.

The Revenue Officers, when they arrived on the scene, could find no smugglers, but feeling suspicious, they dragged the pond and after a short while landed the kegs. John Frost, the farmer who owned Halsbeare, was considered by the Government men to be implicated in the affair. Although he assured the officers that he had nothing to do with the presence of the brandy kegs in his pond, the poor yeoman was threatened with a heavy fine which would have ruined him.

The trial was arranged to take place in London. Farmer John was at his wit's end. The journey up to London and back would take a long time and he could not leave his farm.

Tradition records that the problem was solved by the action of a very plucky girl. Braving all the dangers of such a long journey at that period, the farmer's daughter, Ellen, rode all the way up to London and back, twice, on a farm horse, in an endeavour to clear her father of the charge of smuggling. Her evidence is said to have cleared her father's name, but the plough oxen and other



valuable stock had to be sold in order to cover the expenses involved in the case. Afterwards, happily to relate, John Frost prospered and recovered his losses.

The heroine of this little tale died unmarried, and was buried at Kentisbeare on the 15th April, 1821.

## THE BLACK DOG OF UPLYME

The village of Uplyme is situated in the extreme south-easterly corner of Devon about a mile from the well-known Dorset seaside resort of Lyme Regis.

Many years ago a farmhouse in the parish of Uplyme was haunted by the ghost of a large black dog.

It appears that when the day's work was over the farmer was accustomed to sit by the great open fireplace in the farmhouse kitchen and rest awhile before retiring to bed. As soon as he had settled down comfortably, and was preparing to smoke his pipe, the spectre of a black dog would slowly materialize at the opposite side of the hearth. The creature would sit quietly by the fire until the farmer rose from his seat to go to bed, and then it would suddenly vanish from sight.

At first the farmer was much puzzled and annoyed by the nightly visits of his ghostly companion, but in time he became used to the presence of the apparition and hardly took any notice of it. One night, however, when he happened to be in rather an irritable mood, he summoned up the courage to strike at it with the poker, whereupon the creature jumped up, and rushed frantically through every room in the house, finally leaping out through the roof which was considerably damaged by the spectre's turbulent departure.

A few days later, while repairs were being carried out to the hole in the roof, a large sum of money was discovered hidden at the foot of one of the rafters close to the scene of the damage. It was thought at the time that the presence of the concealed hoard in the house had undoubtedly been the reason for the haunting.

Apparently, the discovery of the money in the farmhouse

did not entirely satisfy the guardian spirit, because although it ceased to haunt the house, it continued to frequent an adjacent lane for many years afterwards, which, in consequence, came to be known as Dog Lane.

The Black Dog Hotel at Uplyme also owes its name to the circumstances described in the foregoing story.

The belief that hidden treasure is often protected by a guardian spirit is a very old superstition indeed. It would seem that those who have died without revealing the secret hiding-place of treasure usually haunt the neighbourhood of the place of concealment until the hoard is discovered. The story about Downhouse, near Tavistock, in Chapter III, is another excellent example of this type of ghost-legend.

### THE TREASURE OF TROW HILL

The main road from Exeter to Lyme Regis passes through Sidford, a straggling village situated in the lovely Vale of the Sid in East Devon; it then climbs a very steep hill, called Trow Hill, from which magnificent views may be obtained in a westerly direction, and also northwards over the Harcombe valley. At the top of the hill a road branching off to the right leads to the charming and secluded little village of Salcombe Regis, and close to this turning there is a field to which is attached a most interesting legend.

According to an old local tradition, the field in question was supposed to be haunted by the apparition of a lady in grey who was occasionally to be seen gliding to and fro over the surface of the field as though searching for something.

The yeoman farmer who owned the field early in the nineteenth century was a hard-working man, but he was by no means rich, and he found it a difficult task to provide food and clothing for his numerous children.

It appears that one day about the year 1811, the yeoman was ploughing the field with his team of oxen, when one of the beasts suddenly sank into the ground. After

a considerable amount of exertion he managed to extract the animal from the subsidence, and upon examining the cavity thus exposed he was amazed to discover that it contained a large and valuable hoard of treasure.

The farmer wisely kept his wonderful discovery to himself, and when inquisitive people questioned him about the subsidence, he informed them that the cavity must have been an old smuggler's hiding-place, and that it had contained nothing but earth and stones.

A few weeks after the strange event in the haunted field, a number of large boxes were taken from the farm to a neighbouring village, from which place they were swiftly conveyed by special coach to London. Tradition also records that, in due course, when his children grew up and became married, the worthy yeoman was able to bestow upon each one of them the sum of fifteen hundred pounds as a wedding gift.

After the finding of the golden hoard, the ghost of the lady in grey was never seen any more in the field, and it was thought at the time that the discovery of the treasure had evidently caused the haunting to cease.

The foregoing story, which would appear to be a typical treasure-guarding spirit legend, is mentioned in the book—"A Descriptive Sketch of Sidmouth," by T. H. Mogridge, which was published in the year 1836.

## CHAPTER VII

### WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY

WITCHCRAFT has flourished amongst all races, and in all lands, since the dawn of recorded history, and in all probability since the early days of primeval man.

In Biblical times, King Saul, when in dire trouble, consulted the celebrated Witch of Endor, and in the great days of Rome the Emperor Augustus had his own private soothsayers.

In 1333, it was proved that Robert of Artois was using black magic against the Queen and the Dauphin of France.\* In 1441, Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, was accused, with a number of other people, of trying to bring about the death of Henry VI by the means of necromancy and in 1616 the Countess of Somerset was convicted of murder involving witchcraft, but was subsequently pardoned by James I.†

All through history people in high positions have, on occasions, consulted wizards or witches when they have been frustrated in their ambitions, or beset by great perils.

Today, it is almost impossible for anyone to realise how powerful was the influence of witchcraft on the lives of the people of this country during mediaeval times. In his famous sermon before Queen Elizabeth I, Bishop Jewel, referring to witchcraft, said, "Your Grace's subjects pine away, even unto the death, their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft."

The worthy bishop was by no means guilty of an over-

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\* "The Plantagenets," by John Harvey, page 85.

† "Witchcraft in England," by Christina Hole, pp. 117—122.

statement. The great majority of the population firmly believed that, by the art of sorcery, the witches were able to control dangerous natural forces, and to summon the spirits of the unseen world to aid them in their malicious schemes.

In country districts the conviction was widespread that witches were able to cause milk to turn sour in the coldest weather, cattle to die strangely, and people to fall unaccountably ill. A really powerful enchanter was supposed to be able to raise storms, sink ships at sea, cause drought, famine or pestilence, and take the form of an animal when it suited his purpose to do so.

If by any chance a sorcerer failed to carry out correctly all the complicated details of the casting of a particularly strong spell, there was always a danger that he himself might be destroyed by the terrible forces unleashed.

It was not only because certain persons happened to be wizards or witches that they were so much dreaded by the community, but because of the terrifying and devastating powers of darkness and evil they had at their command.

At the present day the African witch-doctor holds sway over the members of his tribe, not only by hypnotism, telepathy, and a skilful exploitation of the effects of auto-suggestion on their highly superstitious minds, but also through their abject fear of the terrible and diabolic powers he is reputed to be able to invoke if thwarted. In exactly the same way, the witches of the Middle Ages worked on the imaginations and superstitions of the people of this country, holding them in the deepest thrall.

The most dreaded weapon used in witchcraft was murder by the secret and almost untraceable method of image-making. This malefic ritual consisted in the making of a little image of wax or clay roughly resembling the intended victim, and named with his name. The power of the spell was considered to be greatly increased if a lock of the victim's hair, or a small piece of his clothing were to be incorporated in the figure. Pins driven into the limbs of the image were supposed to cause violent pains in the

identical parts of the unfortunate person's body ; a sharp nail driven through its head or heart caused madness or instant death. If an image made of clay were buried in the ground, or one of wax allowed to melt very slowly in front of a low fire, the victim would die gradually of a wasting disease. The only hope of saving the doomed person from certain death was by searching for, and discovering, the dissolving figure before it was too late.

When a person realised that a witch was endeavouring to accomplish his destruction by necromancy, sheer terror on the part of the victim was often sufficient to achieve the desired purpose. With this in mind, Christina Hole, in her fascinating book, "Witchcraft in England," observes:

"Suggestion and fear could undermine his confidence and cause failure in his work or in some cherished enterprise and, in extreme cases, reduce him to a nervous wreck. When the Earl of Derby fell ill at Latham in 1594 his doctors, probably rightly, ascribed the trouble to quite natural and curable causes. But a wax image had been found in his bedroom and an old woman had been heard mumbling something which might have been a spell. He became convinced that he was bewitched and that his doctors could do nothing for him, and such being his state of mind, he died within ten days, though there seems to have been no actual medical reason why he should not have recovered."

The foregoing case is a good example of the way in which a victim's faith in the power of a sorcerer was strong enough to bring about his death by auto-suggestion.

Another very ancient superstition is the once widely held belief that the evil spells of a black witch could be broken by pins being stuck into the heart of a freshly killed sheep or bullock, and a great many instances of this curious practice have been recorded in Devon. The power of Hannah Henley, the Membury witch, was reputed to have been broken by this method in 1841. In March, 1899 a bullock's heart covered with pins was discovered hidden behind the beam spanning the kitchen fireplace at Devenish Pit Farm, Farway, and in 1902, a bullock's

heart stuck with thousands of pins and sharp black thorns, was found in an outhouse at a farm at Hatherleigh.

Most witches and sorcerers were reputed to possess familiar spirits who were called upon when special tasks had to be performed. When a witch required the aid of her familiar, she wove a particular spell, and then ordered the spirit to appear. Having made an offering to the creature, or in some cases struck it lightly with a withy wand, she would then send it on whatever sinister errand she had in mind. The familiar spirits seem to have taken many different forms and shapes. In some cases they were little demons or "black men," in others they appeared as dogs, cats, doves, toads, and even lions.\*

At his interrogation before the Bishop's commissioner on August 20th, 1566, a man named John Wellshe, who had lived for several years at Seaton, said that his familiar spirit came to him "sometyme like a graye blackisse culver,† or a brendyd dogge, or like a vay;‡" and when Temperance Lloyd, one of the three Bideford Witches, was being examined on July 3rd, 1682, she confessed to possessing a familiar spirit that appeared to her in the form of a little black man, and that "he was about the length of her Arm: And that his Eyes were very big; and that he hopt or leapt in the way before her."

Some authorities consider that there was in fact a religious community of witches in mediaeval times, and that this organisation was not a heretical Christian sect but a survival of pure paganism.

Lewis Spence in his book "Hero Tales and Legends of the Rhine," tells us that when Christianity had nominally conquered paganism, it was the womenfolk of the Germanic race who, by the persistent practice of arts derived from the priests of Odin and Thor, conserved the ancient Teutonic "magico-religious" lore which they were eventually destined to convey to the witches and wizards of the Middle Ages.

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\* See "Legends of Devon," by J. R. W. Coxhead, pp. 123—125, 132—133, 135 and 139—141.

† Dove.

‡ In West-Country dialect the word "vay" means a fay—a kind of fairy.

It has been suggested that Christianity gained ground very slowly during the Middle Ages, and although the ruling classes were true Christians the great mass of the people were actually pagans, and that the ancient nature-religion continued to flourish secretly until a much later date than is generally supposed.\*

In connection with this belief, Christina Hole makes the following observations in her book on witchcraft:—

"The "Devil" of the witch trials was in reality the Horned God who had been worshipped under many names from prehistoric times, and the Sabbat was simply a religious ceremony at which he was adored, and at which the magical rites of fertility cults were carried on. Thus the dances and orgies, the giving of new names and "devil's marks," the pact, or oath of allegiance, were not the horrible perversions of Christianity that they appeared to outsiders but merely the ceremonies of a totally different faith that had survived unchanged from Palaeolithic times.

"This theory would account for many things in the history of witchcraft that are otherwise difficult to understand. It would explain the curious uniformity of witch confessions, with all their striking details of initiation, sacrifice, and homage to a horned central figure. It would account for the organised covens, the Esbats and Sabbats at regular intervals, the search for converts and the ease with which those converts were obtained. It would account also for the courage shown by many accused witches, and their refusal to repent even in the face of a horrible death."

We know that long after Christianity became the accepted religion of Western Europe, paganism continued to flourish secretly in secluded places. Nature-worship went on in spite of every effort on the part of the Church authorities to suppress it, and the forbidden dance of the horned men still took place on the Calends of January. For centuries after the coming of Christianity to Devon, people

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\* "The Witch-Cult in Western Europe," by M. A. Murray.



living in the more remote districts still occasionally turned to the old gods for help when in dire distress.

There have been several cases of animal sacrifice to primeval deities, in wild and lonely places among the high hills, during times of great trouble. The people concerned would appear to have turned to the old gods for aid when their Christian prayers were apparently of no avail. Many instances have been recorded, from time to time, of this superstitious, but nevertheless deep-seated allegiance to the ancient religion. Some of the rites practised during these relapses from the Christian faith reached far beyond the days of the early Saxons into the shadowy depths of prehistoric times.

In 1866, a calf was sacrificed in Lincolnshire in order to protect a herd of cattle from murrain, and as recently as the year 1879, a farmer living on the western side of Dartmoor, who had experienced a considerable amount of misfortune with his cattle, killed one of his sheep, and burned it on the wild moorland above his farm as a sacrifice to the pixies. Shortly after the offering had been made the cattle recovered from their sickness and did well, and he never had any further trouble afterwards. In both these cases the farmers in question were probably good church-going Christians, but in a time of great distress, they had simply reverted to an ancient ritual that had never been quite forgotten in their respective districts.

A community of witches was known as a "coven," and usually consisted of thirteen persons, but was sometimes larger, and occasionally smaller. Miss Murray, in her book "*The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*," tells us that the members of the witch-coven represented the priesthood of the faith, and the Chief of a coven stood in the place of the god except on those few occasions when the Grand Master was present. Meetings, called Esbats, were held in great secrecy every week at some safe and convenient place. All the covens of a particular district joined together to hold the great quarterly meetings, known as Sabbats, which generally took place at Candlemas, May Day, Lammas, and Hallowtide.

Secluded places such as a remote glade in a large area of woodland, or an isolated coombe among the hills, were usually chosen for the quarterly meetings. According to confessions made by Margaret Johnson in 1633, there was always a large gathering on Good Friday in Pendle Forest in Lancashire, and in 1664, the Somerset witches confessed to having held meetings in Brewham Forest.

The Sabbath was held at night, and was presided over by the Grand Master. It was a combination of religious ceremony, magical ritual, and business meeting.

Disguised and wearing a horned mask, the Grand Master, representing the god,\* would have been enthroned in the centre of the forest glade surrounded by a throng of excited and adoring witches. Although he was a man known to most of the people present at the gathering, he was transformed in their minds, for the time being, into something unearthly. He was the Horned God, and the spirit dwelt in him, and was worshipped through him.

What a weird and terrifying scene it must have been! The great trees surrounding the glade lit by the angry and fitful glare of the flaming torches, the dark and sinister central figure, and the wild abandon of the surging crowd of fanatical worshippers. For a fleeting instant, the grey mists of time drift apart to reveal, in all its stark barbarity, a primeval religion hoary with age and enshrouded in sombre mystery.

Religious communities of witches dedicated to the worship of the Horned God may have been fairly widespread in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, but never, at any time, have such organisations been very numerous in England. At various times some witches in this country have confessed to the worship of an alien god, but the majority simply practised the dark art of necromancy without taking part in any avowed pagan ritual. The practise of magic, and the performance of fertility rites, did not necessarily mean that the persons taking part were followers of the old gods. It did mean, however, that they were indulging in something which was strictly

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\* Usually referred to as the "Devil" in most of the witch trials.

forbidden by the Church both on moral and doctrinal grounds.

Witches have been persecuted in all countries and in all ages. In England the persecution of persons suspected of witchcraft was never so severe as it was in some Continental countries. It reached its highest pitch of ferocity in this country, however, during the seventeenth century when countless lonely and blameless people were cruelly hounded to their deaths by their ignorant and superstitious neighbours.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that a large number of the people who were executed had definitely dabbled in the secret and perilous art of necromancy.

The most famous witchcraft trial ever to take place in Devon occurred in 1682, when three Bideford Witches, Temperance Lloyd, Susanna Edwards and Mary Trembles, were condemned to death, and executed at Exeter. A reproduction of a rare contemporary account of the trial appears in Chapter V of the author's book, "Legends of Devon."

The last execution for sorcery took place in Devon in 1684/5, when Alice Molland perished at Exeter, and then, in 1736, an act was passed making it illegal to prosecute anyone for the alleged crime of witchcraft.

All through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries necromancy continued to flourish in country districts, but with the approach of the twentieth century, the fear of witchcraft, which had hung like a dark cloud over the community for so long, gradually passed away, as many of the ancient superstitions fell before the onset of better education and greater enlightenment.

The three cases of witchcraft that follow should be of considerable interest to all students of West Country folklore.

## THE WITCH HARE

Many years ago, when witchcraft was widespread in Devon, it was commonly believed that witches had the power to be able to change themselves into animals whenever they wished to do so.

The idea of a human being taking the form of an animal is very ancient indeed, and many stories about werewolves are to be found in the folklore of a number of European countries. A werewolf was a man who had been turned into a wolf by a powerful sorcerer, or had assumed the form of a wolf of his own free will for some secret purpose.

In England, by far the most usual form taken by witches was that of the hare, and it was firmly believed by the majority of countryfolk that a witch in the form of a hare could only be killed by a silver bullet. A case of a witch being killed in this way is recorded by Christina Hole in page 58 of her wonderfully interesting book, "Witchcraft in England"; and in the "Transactions of the Devonshire Association," Vol. 57, page 120, a story is given of how a woman in the parish of Rose Ash, near South Molton, about the year 1885, was discovered with leg wounds after a man had wounded a hare with pellets made from a sixpence.

Hannah Henley, the famous Witch of Membury, who died on 9th April, 1841,\* was reputed to have had the power to turn herself into a hare, and the Cotley Harriers are said to have hunted her on many occasions.†

A most interesting story, from the neighbourhood of Tavistock, of a witch frequently taking the form of a hare is given by Mrs. Bray in her book "The Borders of the Tamar and the Tavy," under the date January 8th, 1833. The story is reproduced as follows:—

"An old witch, in days of yore, lived in this neighbourhood; and whenever she wanted money, she would assume the shape of a hare, and would send out her grandson to tell a certain huntsman who lived hard by, that he had seen a hare sitting at such a particular spot, for which he always received the reward of sixpence. After this deception had many times been practised, the dogs turned out, the hare pursued, often seen, but never caught, a sportsman of the party began to suspect, in the language of tradition, "that the devil was in the dance," and

\* Trans. Devon. Assoc., Vol. 59, p. 231.

† "Legends of Devon," by J. R. W. Coxhead, p. 155.

there would be no end to it. The matter was discussed, a justice consulted, and a clergyman to boot ; and it was thought that, however clever the devil might be, law and church combined would be more than a match for him. It was therefore agreed that, as the boy was singularly regular in the hour at which he came to announce the sight of the hare, all should be in readiness for a start the instant such information was given : and a neighbour of the witch, nothing friendly to her, promised to let the parties know directly when the old woman and her grandson left the cottage and went off together ; the one to be hunted, and the other to set on the hunt.

" The news came, the hounds were unkennelled, and huntsmen and sportsmen set off with surprising speed. The witch, now a hare, and her little colleague in iniquity, did not expect so very speedy a turn out ; so that the game was pursued at a desperate rate, and the boy, forgetting himself in a moment of alarm, was heard to exclaim, " Run, Granny, run ; run for your life ! " At last the pursuers lost the hare, and she once more got safe into the cottage by a little hole in the bottom of the door ; but not large enough to admit a hound in chase. The huntsman, all the squires with their train, lent a hand to break open the door, but could not do it till the parson and the justice came up ; but as law and church were certainly designed to break through iniquity, even so did they now succeed in bursting the magic bonds that opposed them. Up stairs they all went. There they found the old hag bleeding, and covered with wounds, and still out of breath. She denied she was a hare, and railed at the whole party. " Call up the hounds," said the huntsman, " and let us see what they take her to be ; may be we may yet have another hunt."

" On hearing this, the old woman cried quarter. The boy dropped on his knees, and begged hard for mercy—mercy was granted on condition of its being received together with a good whipping ; and the huntsman, having long practised amongst the hounds, now tried his hand on their game. Thus, the old woman escaped a worse

fate for the time present ; but on being afterwards put on her trial for bewitching a young woman, and making her spit pins, the tale just told was given as evidence against her, before a particularly learned judge, and a remarkably sagacious jury, and the old woman finished her days, like a martyr, at the stake."

If the old woman in the foregoing story was actually tried for the crime of witchcraft, convicted, and eventually executed, then her death must have taken place before the year 1685, because the last person in Devon to suffer death for sorcery was Alice Molland, who was executed at Exeter in March 1684/5.

In 1696, Elizabeth Horner was tried as a witch before Chief Justice Holt, and her acquittal ended the last trial to be held in Devon for Witchcraft. Forty years later, in the year 1736, the penal Act of James I was removed from the statute book, and, thereafter, all prosecutions for alleged witchcraft became illegal.

A story about an enchanted hare is also attached to a certain area of Dartmoor, in the neighbourhood of Chagford. The tale, which is recorded in a very scarce book called "Dartmoor and its Borders," published in 1873, is as follows :—

"Once upon a time many years ago there was a hare on the moor, near this town, (Chagford), which nobody could kill. Puss was very big, and of a whitish grey colour. Often and often was this hare shot at, but she always got away. Doctor —, of Moreton, who had some wonderful hounds, once coursed her, when the hare ran clean away, leaving the dogs as though they'd been standing still. The fame of the hare was spread abroad, and people far and near talked about her. Squire — made a bet he'd kill her with his pack of harriers, which were known never to miss anything. The hounds accordingly were laid on, and the hare was found sitting on some furze stubbles. Away she ran, and the hounds after her. For nearly an hour she was chased, and just as she was nearly ran into she took refuge in a tangled break, where the hounds, having found and killed a young hare, could not be induced

to try further, as they thought they had killed their game. Who do you think this hare was? Why, no other than Moll Stancombe, who lived in a hut, near the Moor, and changed herself from an old woman into a hare whenever she pleased. A rival witch was applied to, and she said, "The only way to get hold of her is to shoot her with a silver bullet." Accordingly some silver was moulded into a bullet, and Giles — sallied forth to have a shot at Puss, who was seen eating clover by "moonlight alone." Giles — fired at her, but lo! the gun burst and blew off his hand. Giles —, sir, was a cast-off lover of Moll's; and she was heard afterwards to say, "Sarve en right." Well matters became very serious, for whenever Puss was seen something went wrong in the neighbourhood. Whoever offended Moll lost cattle, or met with damage of some kind. A witch belonging to Widdecombe-in-the-Moor was consulted, and she recommended that the obnoxious hare should be coured with a "speyed bitch." The animal was procured, and on a fine moonlight evening Puss was seen enjoying herself in a clover field. The dog was soon in full chase after her; but, strange to say, the hare could not leave the dog, nor could the dog come up to the hare. On reaching a thick hedge, however, Puss sprang through, and the dog jumped at her, and tore off a piece of the flesh from the part nearest to it. The owner of the dog immediately went to the hut of Moll Stancombe; and, finding the door barred, he peeped in at the window, and observed Moll putting up a large plaster to the wound, which had been made in the exact place where the dog had seized the hare. This was considered confirmatory evidence of the fact that the hare was Moll, and that Moll was the hare. The bite of the dog, however, proved such a lesson to Moll that she never afterwards appeared in the form of a hare."

The foregoing story was given to the author of "Dartmoor and its Borders," by an old woman living near Chagford, and serves as an excellent example of the ancient belief, once held all over Devon, that witches possessed the magic power of being able to turn themselves into hares whenever they wished to do so.

## THE COUNTER-SPELL

There were two types of witch—black, and white. The black witch was the dreaded enemy of the community, while the white witch, also known as the "wiseman" or "wisewoman," was its friend and protector.

Like the black witch, the white witch also relied upon the power of magic, but he used it to cure diseases, find stolen goods, and to defeat evil spells.

By the aid of sorcery the black witch worked much mischief, but by similar means the white witch sought only to do good.

In the days when there were very few doctors in country districts, the wiseman, by his expert knowledge of herbs, was enabled to heal both man and beast of many an ailment.

Although the majority of black witches were women, there seem to have been more men than women amongst the white witches. This may be explained by the fact that white witches were required to perform a very large amount of exacting work of a veterinary nature in agricultural districts.\*

In the days when witchcraft was so universal in Devon one of the chief tasks of the wiseman was to defeat evil spells cast by the black witches. The weird manner in which this was done is well illustrated by the following strange story.

About the year 1897, Dr. G. G. Gidley, of Cullompton, came in contact with a very remarkable case of witchcraft. The case is a particularly valuable one to students of Devon folklore because it is absolutely authentic—the woman concerned in the story being one of the doctor's own patients. A detailed account of the case, written by Dr. Gidley, appeared in the "Transactions of the Devonshire Association" in 1917,† and a copy of this statement is reproduced below:—

"About twenty years ago, I was consulted by a woman

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\* The famous white witch of Exeter was a man named Tuckett, and another man from Exeter, named Snow, was working as a white witch in 1887.

† "Trans. Devon. Assoc.," Vol. 49, pp. 69—71.



past middle age who was suffering from a growth (suspiciously cancerous) in the breast. I advised her to lose no time in undergoing an operation, and following my advice she went to the Tiverton Hospital. She could not be admitted the day she applied as there was no room for her, but was told to come again on a certain day later in the week. In the meantime, however, she met someone who told her that she could cure her without operation, as she "knew something" which the patient did not know concerning the origin of the ailment, and this was, that a certain person was "evil-wishing" her. Being of quite the old and rural school of thought this appealed to the old lady rather forcibly, and she determined to give a trial to the performance advocated by her friend. This consisted in secretly procuring a sheep's heart and, as secretly, at a certain hour of the night sticking pins into it, and at the same time reciting some such formula as this: "May each pin: thus stuck in this poor heart: in hers to go who hurts me so till she departs." When sufficient pins were driven home, the heart and its pins were to be placed upon the bar that holds up the pot hooks in the chimney and left there.

"All this she religiously observed, and watched the result.

"Now the curious part of this story is that a certain woman in the neighbourhood became ill and weak, and eventually died; and a still more curious coincidence is that synchronously with that person's increasing feebleness the growth in the breast of the other woman gradually dwindled and at last disappeared.

"It was not for some three or four years that I saw her again after she left me to go to the hospital, and, of course, I was anxious to know by what means the trouble had been overcome. She was very mysterious and reticent about it at first, but eventually she told me the facts I have mentioned. She lived nine or ten years afterwards."

Dr. G. G. Gidley, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., who recorded the foregoing tale of witchcraft in Devon from his own

personal experience, died at Heyford House, Cullompton, on the 15th January, 1938.

The once widely held belief that the evil spells of a black witch could be broken by pins being stuck into the heart of a freshly killed sheep or bullock is a very ancient superstition, and a great many instances of this aspect of witchcraft have been recorded in Devon. On 2nd February, 1957, the author of this book obtained a very interesting, and comparatively recent, example of a case of this type from Mr. A. J. Dimond of Sutton's Farm, Northleigh.

Mr. Dimond was born in the year 1901 at Devenish Pit Farm, in the parish of Farway in East Devon, which, at the time, was being farmed by his grandfather, Mr. William Hart.

It appears that shortly after taking over the farm, in March 1899, Mr. Hart made a very strange discovery. Nailed to the back of the oak beam spanning the great open fireplace in the farm-house kitchen was a large brown paper bag in which was concealed a bullock's heart stuck all over with pins. Being a highly superstitious man, Mr. Hart decided to leave the weird relic of bygone magical ritual severely alone, so it remained undisturbed until he retired from farming in March 1917.

The next tenant at the farm, Mr. Thomas Banks, also allowed the heart to stay in the position it had occupied for so long, and there it has remained right up to the present day.

On the 3rd April, 1957, the heart was shown to the author by Mr. Arthur Banks, the present owner of Devenish Pit, who is the son of the previous tenant.

Although the heart is a queer and fantastic object, it is, nevertheless, remarkably interesting from the folklore point of view. Dried up with age, and slightly shrivelled like very old leather, it is beginning to crumble, in places, into a fine brown powder. Hundreds of pins are thrust into it right up to their heads, making patterns which have the appearance of being shaped like little crosses. It is believed that the heart was placed behind the mantel-

tree of the fireplace about the year 1877 as a protection against the wicked spells of a local black witch.

Further examples of the hearts of animals, stuck all over with pins or nails, being used for the purpose of breaking the malefic spells cast by black witches, may be found in the author's book, "Legends of Devon," page 160, and in the "Transactions of the Devonshire Association," Vol. 35, p. 136; Vol. 59, p. 163; Vol. 60, pp. 121-122; Vol. 67, p. 136; and Vol. 68, p. 92.

## THE BLOOD TEST

A particularly barbaric way of finding out if a person were a witch survived in Devon until as recently as the year 1924. This method, which is so ancient that its origin is lost in the grey mists of time, was known as "scoring above the breath." A bewitched person would attack the supposed witch with a new nail or a pin, and draw blood above the nose, and if the spell were broken it was thought to be a sure proof of witchcraft.

One of the earliest recorded cases of this kind in England occurred in 1279, when John de Warham was fined twelve pence by the Court Leet at King's Lynn for scratching a witch's face.\*

In more recent times, however, it was considered sufficient to scratch a witch on the hand or arm in order to draw blood for the purpose of breaking a spell (Trans. Devon. Assoc., Vol. 31, p. 117).

The following extremely interesting example of the persistent manner in which ancient superstitions and beliefs have lingered in country districts right up to modern times, has been taken from the "Transactions of the Devonshire Association," and is undoubtedly based on the traditional act of "scoring above the breath"†:—

"A remarkable defence was set up by a man charged at Cullompton Petty Sessions, on Monday, 8th December, 1924, with having assaulted a woman on 21st November.

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\* "Witchcraft in England," by Christina Hole, p. 111.

† Trans. Devon. Assoc., Vol. 57, pp. 118-119.

He declared that the woman had "ill-wished" him and "bewitched" his pig, and he declared that the police should raid her house.

"The defendant was Alfred John Matthews, aged 43, a smallholder, living at Clyst St. Lawrence. He was summoned by Ellen Garnsworthy, a married middle-aged woman, of the same place, who alleged common assault on the 21st November.

"Mr. A. Norman Lake (Exeter) appeared for the prosecutrix, and said that a more cowardly and dastardly assault it would be impossible to imagine. Defendant scratched the woman deliberately with a pin, and, although blood poisoning did not result, the case might have been more serious. The defendant lived two doors from the complainant.

"Ellen Garnsworthy stated that on her way to fetch water on the 21st November she passed defendant's door, and as she did so Matthews put out his hand and caught hold of her. She had to pass his door a second time, and he grasped both her arms. She felt a sharp pain, and her arms began to bleed. Witness was frightened, and said she would fetch her husband.

"Defendant said, "Perhaps that will teach you to leave other people's things alone." Witness declared that she had never touched anything of his, and that she did not understand his meaning. Defendant thereupon said, "I have something else inside for you," and witness thought he meant a gun, and that he would shoot her. Witness told her husband immediately. Witness had never had any "words" with defendant, and she could not understand what his motive was.

"In reply to the Bench, defendant admitted scratching the woman with pins—"one stroke on each hand," he said.

"P.C. Nickels described the condition of complainant's arms. Her forearms, he said, had many scratches, and blood was trickling down over her hands. There were five scratches on the left forearm and four on the right. One of the scratches on the left forearm was five inches long, and one on the right three inches long.

"When witness interviewed defendant, the latter said the woman had been "ill-wishing" him. "I did not touch her with my arms," he said. "I did it with a pin. She was absolutely beat."

"Witness remarked that a woman was generally "beat" when a man molested her in the way defendant had Mrs. Garnsworthy. Defendant then said: "I have done it—I predicted I would do it, and I have done it." Repeating that the woman had "ill-wished" him, defendant complained that "he could not get his sow fat, and he thought he would have to shoot it." Witness advised the defendant to leave the woman alone, but he repeated, "I have done it," and added: "If they go to law over it I shall tell them so."

"Witness thought that defendant was a dangerous man, and that he might attack the husband next.

"Defendant declared that "the thing must come out." "This woman," he said, "is in possession of a crystal."

According to the conclusion of the report on this rather remarkable case, it appears that the Chairman of the Magistrates did not quite catch the last word used by Matthews in his statement, so he asked him if he had said "pistol," and Matthews replied, "No; a crystal—a globe-like thing. The police have to protect the public in such a matter, and I do not see why I should not ask them to make a raid on her house in search of such a thing."

Another magistrate, Mr. A. W. Hopkins, then questioned the defendant saying, "What do you allege—witchcraft?" and Matthews answered, "Yes."

Greatly astonished, Mr. Hopkins exclaimed, "Such a fallacy died out years ago," and the defendant retorted "Oh, no it didn't. It hasn't with some of us. I say there should be a raid on that house."

Matthews was sentenced to a month's imprisonment.

There is little doubt that many people, on reading the foregoing account, will be most surprised that a case involving alleged witchcraft could possibly occur in Devon at so late a date as the year 1924. They will be even more

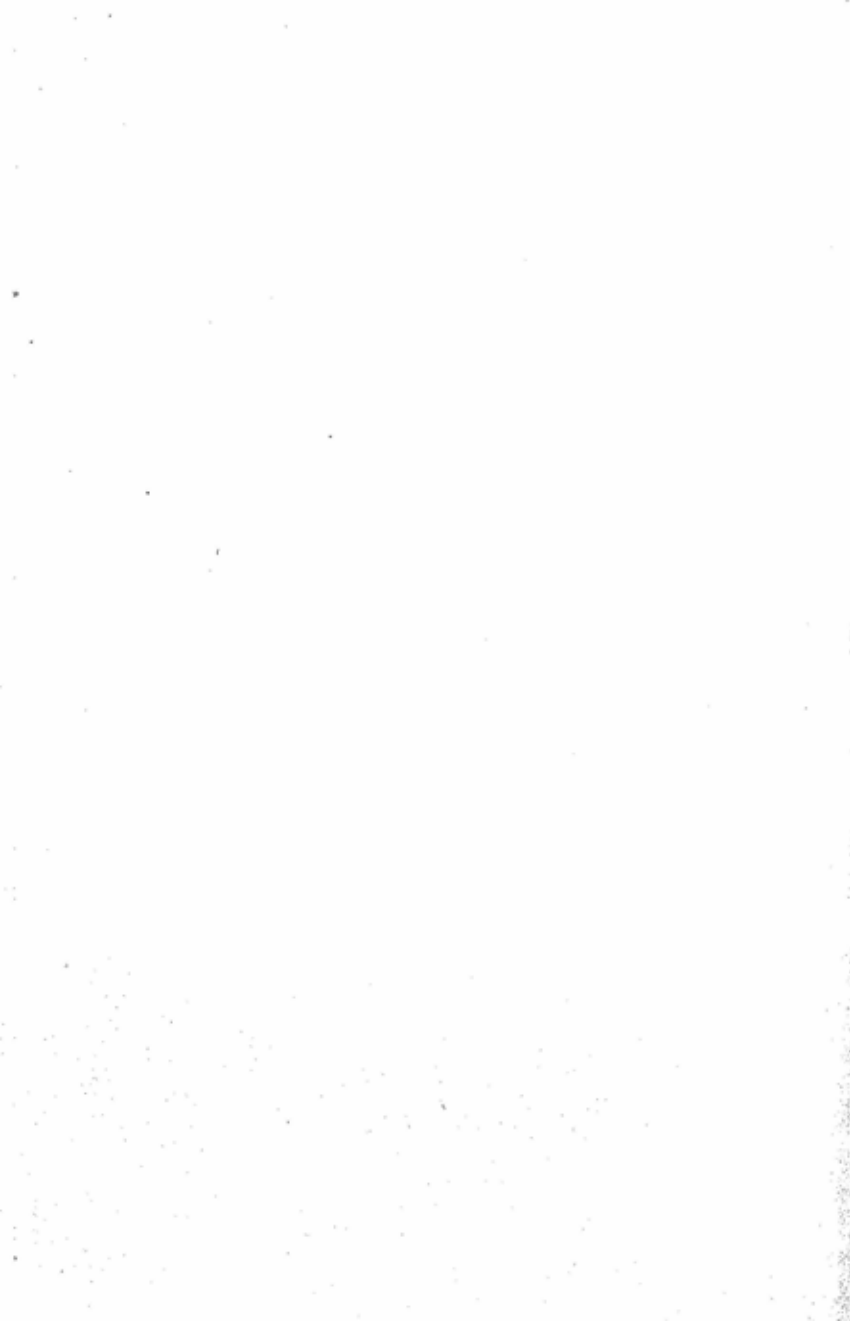
surprised to know that a case, in which magic ritual was actually performed, was recorded by the Sunday Times of January 6th, 1939. \*

Another good example of witchcraft in modern times is to be found in the almost legendary life of the notorious, Aleister Crowley, who practised black magic in Sicily in 1934.

Old beliefs die hard, and it is known to be a fact that Black Magic is still secretly performed in many of the greatest cities of the world, including London. The veneer of civilisation is thinner than is generally supposed, and there are still those who, for some dark purpose, or out of mere curiosity, are willing to dabble in the dangerous art of Black Magic even in this Atomic Age.

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